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EXPERIENCES OF CONSERVATIVE ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN STUDENTS ATTENDING PUBLIC
SECULAR ACCREDITED COUNSELING AND
COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATE PROGRAMS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
In
The Counselor Education Program

by

Paul D. Schaefer

B. A., University of New Orleans, 1995
M.Ed., University of New Orleans, 1998

May 2006

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DEDICATION

This work is
dedicated to
the One who
was, is, and
forever shall be, to the Father, only Son,
Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. You are my
strength, my rock, my comfort, my hope,
my provision, and my salvation.

This work is
also
dedicated to
the many
who have
gone to
secular
programs
before me
and those
who will
come after.
May His
grace be
upon you.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs. Conservative orthodox Christian students who were attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs were recruited by e-mail. A prescreening interview was conducted with each respondent.

Seven respondents participated in three rounds of individual interviews. The overall research question was: What are the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs? Follow-up questions explored the participants' perceptions and experiences in depth.

Data were analyzed through within case and cross case displays using a phenomenological approach. Emergent categories, themes, and descriptors were gathered from each round of interviews. Data were organized into three major categories: *reflections on secular programs*, *experiences attending secular programs* and *Christian identity*, and further organized into underlying themes and descriptors. Implications related to conservative orthodox Christian students attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs were discussed. Finally, suggestions for future research were provided.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this introduction is to familiarize the reader with the theoretical framework that supports the investigation of conservative orthodox Christian students' experiences in public, secular, accredited counseling graduate programs. Accordingly, this chapter includes a summary of the overall background, rationale, purpose, significance and methodology of this study.

Overview

Multiculturalism, tolerance and respect for diversity are core values of the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). A multicultural force that has received increased attention over the past several decades is religious diversity (Bergin, 1983; Gartner, Larson, & Allen, 1991; Worthington, Kurusu, McCullough, & Sandage, 1996). However, there are no specific, set rules or standards that must be followed in regards to religious diversity. A search of standards related to the ethical treatment of the religiously diverse revealed general guidelines, grounded in philosophical and epistemological presuppositions, set forth by the ACA and its divisions. These guidelines act to assist counselor educators in making decisions, but they are only general guidelines that can be interpreted in various ways. Thus, fulfillment of ethical standards is partly a subjective determination. The purpose of professional guidelines established by groups of professionals is to protect practitioners, consumers and the profession involved; but they do not contain absolutes and are revised regularly (Corey, Corey & Callahan, 2006). Thus, interpretations of these guidelines and standards may manifest themselves in a

variety of forms depending on a counselor educator's underlying presuppositions and worldview.

Review of Relevant Literature

Ethical responsibilities and the religiously diverse

Many governing bodies, including ACA, CACREP, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD), and the Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC), provide general principles to guide the ethical responsibilities of counselor educators toward diversity. Within these areas of diversity, religion and spirituality are included.

For example, the ACA (2005) *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* provides several principles regarding individuals with diverse religious value systems. These standards include: (a) counselor educators are encouraged to be sensitive to recruitment and retention needs for training program administrators, faculty, and students with diverse backgrounds; (b) counselor educators are to serve as role models for ethical behavior and ensure counseling programs and courses are conducted in agreement with guidelines promoted by the various governing agencies; (c) training should ensure that students and supervisees act in a responsible manner toward religious individuals; (d) counselor educators are to train students to provide clients with enough information for informed consent and client freedom of choice; (e) counselor educators are to refrain from imposing personal values on clients and from discriminating based on a person's religion; and (f) counselor educators are encouraged to maintain respect for different

approaches to counseling, diagnose properly given religious diversity, and recognize effects of religion on test administration and interpretation.

CACREP provides additional examples of principles to guide the ethical responsibilities of counselor educators with respect to diversity. The CACREP (2001) standards are the minimal criteria established for institutions in the preparation of professional counselors and counselor educators. The minimal criteria include eight core areas that must be addressed: professional identity, social and cultural diversity, human growth and development, helping relationships, group work, assessment, research, and program evaluation.

The core area of social and cultural diversity derives from the philosophical belief that the counseling profession needs to adapt and change to meet society's needs as society changes. Thus, CACREP maintains a multicultural, pluralistic view. Religious beliefs are specifically included in the CACREP (2001) use of the term multicultural in reference to the diversity present in the nation's population.

In order to address diversity, CACREP standards assert counselor education programs should include literature that provides an understanding of the cultural context of relationships, issues, and trends in a diverse society as they relate to diversity which includes religious values (CACREP, 2001). In addition, program objectives and curriculum should ensure that enough flexibility is provided within the program's curriculum to accommodate individual differences in student knowledge and competencies and to advocate for students where institutional and social barriers impede equal access, equity, and success for all. In reference to mental health counseling

programs, demonstrated knowledge and skills are required of all students to include aspects of religious beliefs and equal treatment in mental health counseling (CACREP).

Another example of ethical guidelines governing standards related to religious diversity is obtained from the AMCD. The AMCD has adopted a set of cross-cultural competencies and objectives that should be adhered to if a person is to be multiculturally effective (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). The appropriate use of skills and knowledge and maintenance of appropriate attitudes and beliefs are essential. According to the AMCD, counselors should be aware of their own cultural values and biases and others' worldviews, and be able to use culturally appropriate strategies.

A final example of guidelines related to religious and spiritual diversity is obtained from the 1995 summit on spirituality of the ASERVIC (Miller, 1999). Nine competencies for integrating spirituality into counseling are recommended by ASERVIC (1995) to include that the professional counselor: (a) can explain the difference between religion and spirituality, including similarities and differences; (b) can describe religious and spiritual beliefs and practices in a cultural context; (c) engages in self-exploration of religious and spiritual beliefs in order to increase sensitivity, understanding and acceptance of diverse belief systems; (d) can describe his or her religious and spiritual belief system and explain various models of religious or spiritual development across the lifespan; (e) can demonstrate sensitivity and acceptance of a variety of religious and spiritual expressions in client communication; (f) can identify limits of his or her understanding of a client's religious or spiritual expression, and demonstrate appropriate referral skills and generate possible referral sources; (g) can assess the relevance of the religious and spiritual domains in the client's therapeutic issues; (h) is sensitive to and

receptive of religious and spiritual themes in the counseling process as befits the expressed preference of each client; and (i) uses a client's religious and spiritual beliefs in the pursuit of the client's therapeutic goals as befits the client's expressed preference.

The examples of the guidelines set forth by ACA, CACREP, AMCD and ASERVIC demonstrate that counselor educators clearly have responsibilities that pertain to tolerance and respect for religious diversity. The ACA, CACREP, AMCD and ASERVIC outline principles that counselor educators can resource and use when performing various functions in relation to the religiously diverse.

Mental health training and religious diversity

Throughout the past several decades, there has been an increase in research and literature on the subjects of religion and spirituality in the mental health professions. For many, religious faith is clearly an important aspect of their lives (Kosmin & Lachman, 1993; Melton 1991, Polling Report, 2004). However, Bergin and Jensen (1990) asserted that therapists are much less religiously oriented than their clients. Worthington (1986) found that clients who hold religion to be very important fear their values will be changed, or they may be misunderstood or misdiagnosed in counseling.

As reviewed, the ethical standards for the ACA (2005) and CACREP (2001) are clear in stating the importance of diversity in counselor education training. Religion is specifically addressed as part of our diverse society within the social and cultural foundations standard (CACREP). CACREP-accredited programs are expected to specifically address religion as an area of diversity to meet standards; however, Kelly (1997) found that 48% of programs did not address religion and spirituality as part of the curriculum. In addition, Kelly (1994) found that less than 25% of surveyed mental

health graduate programs had courses addressing spirituality and religion and that state institutions gave less attention to these issues than religious institutions. Only 33% of training programs taught incorporating religious beliefs and practices in intake procedures when assessing clients (Pate & High, 1995). These discoveries are despite the fact that the majority of the population of the United States appears to hold religion and spirituality as important in some fashion (Kosmin & Lachman, 1993; Melton 1991, Polling Report, 2004). These findings may suggest that counselors are not receiving adequate training in spiritual and religious diversity, and are not adequately trained in how to respond to this diversity or the variables that influence spirituality and religion (Hickson, Housley, & Wages, 2000). As Zimmer-Souza (1999) suggested, there appears to be a discrepancy between the perceived importance of religious and spiritual diversity as outlined by professional ethics and standards and the actual attention given to the topics.

Researchers (Hickson et al., 2000; Kelly, 1994) found that the majority of counselor trainees held religion and spirituality as being important. However, only 16 % of CACREP program department heads affirmed that religious beliefs were an important part of counselor awareness (Pate & High, 1995). Because department heads play a critical role in program structure and curriculum, this finding may help explain the lack of attention to religious diversity training in counselor education.

The counseling community has made efforts to advocate for diversity with respect to gender, age, race, and ethnicity, but has been slower to address issues for people of faith. The counseling community would not be content if a lack of attention occurred in regards to race or other areas of diversity (Pate & Bondi, 1992; Pate & High, 1995).

Religious persons and mental health

Some traditional theories of psychology and mental health historically have held a bias of viewing religiosity as an impediment to healthy mental and emotional functioning (Ellis, 1980; Freud, 1961; Yalom, 1980). However, research pertaining to the relationship between religiosity and mental health, does not appear to support a preconception that religiousness is necessarily correlated with psychopathology (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Bergin, 1983; Gartner et al., 1991; Levin & Vanderpool, 1987; Worthington et al., 1996). If a bias is held, it is probably due more to personal presuppositions and philosophical disposition. Although there appears to be an overall trend toward religion being positively correlated with mental and physical health, the reviews are not conclusive. Maintaining that religiosity is an unhealthy attribute appears inconsistent with the literature (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi; Bergin; Gartner et al.; Levin & Vanderpool; Worthington et al.) and may be at odds with concepts of multiculturalism and ethical guidelines and standards. Worthington et al. suggested that counselors must learn to distinguish between "pathology" and normal, strongly held religious beliefs.

My perception is that all academic disciplines and professions have historical roots in certain epistemological and philosophical or theoretical presuppositions. For example, modern Western mental health professions were founded on and developed from secular presuppositions and a logical positivist epistemology. Secular presuppositions and a logical positivist epistemology may give rise to conflict with persons who hold to a theistic worldview and other epistemology, and may account for some of the discrepancies in data in regard to religion and mental health training programs. As discussed, ethical standards mandate that counselor educators be sensitive

to diversity in regards to religious persons and that future counselor educators are trained to be sensitive to persons of faith. Research findings suggest counselors are not receiving adequate training in religious and spiritual diversity (Hickson et al., 2000). Counselor training programs are the gatekeepers of the profession and one of the major tasks of the profession is to socialize neophytes into what are and what are not appropriate behaviors and values. Although the religious dimension is professed as important in guidelines, required attention has not been given to this area of diversity (Kelly, 1997; Zimmer-Souza, 1999).

If a bias against the religiously committed does exist, it does not appear to be founded on empirical evidence. As stated, the majority of evidence appears to favor a positive relationship between mental health and religion (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Bergin, 1983; Gartner et al.1991; Levin & Vanderpool, 1987; Worthington et al., 1996).

Potential effects of worldview dissonance

All counselors have the potential to act unethically based on their own biases. For example, a religious counselor may promote changes in non-religious persons that are not valued by those persons. Similarly, there is a danger that secular counselors could act as moralists promoting secular values, thus promoting change not valued by religious persons or communities and acting unethically (Bergin, 1980).

A review of current research revealed only one empirical study related to unethical treatment of the religiously diverse in a mental health graduate program. Gartner (1986) found professors were more likely to admit applicants into a graduate psychology program if they made no mention of religion as compared to applicants identified as conservative Protestant Christians even though all other factors were equal.

However, Gartner's investigation was only a pilot study, and findings should be interpreted with caution. Unfortunately, there is a vacuum of literature on religious students' experiences in mental health programs, specifically accredited counseling graduate programs.

Pilot Study

As I progressed through my doctoral program and considered background literature in reference to religious persons and counselor education, I decided to conduct a pilot study as part of an advanced qualitative research graduate course. I hoped that the pilot study might provide some additional insight into the current literature. Participants in the pilot study were undergraduate Christian students attending a secular university. One individual interview was conducted with one student, as well as one group interview that included three students. Students were asked about their experiences as Christian students attending a secular university.

Several findings emerged. The students reported that they valued expression of their Christian identity in the secular university setting when it was appropriate. This might have included wearing a Christian symbol such as a T-shirt or jewelry, or expressing ideas from a Christian worldview during class. They commented on the influence of environmental factors, such as professors, peers, and class type, on their experiences in the secular university. They also commented on their perceptions of support and non-support of their Christian expressions in the secular university, as well as having different responses to these experiences. At times, the students reported that they were supported and encouraged to express their Christian worldview, and at other times they believed they were being attacked for their expressions.

The pilot study suggested that Christian students may go through a variety of experiences as students in a secular university. For these students, it would seem that the religious dimension of life is an important factor, and environmental influences may interact to contribute to or detract from feelings of well-being and success.

The findings of the pilot study helped increase my interest in the study of religious students attending public, secular, accredited counseling graduate programs. Although the pilot study investigated Christian students in a broad context, the current study specifically explored the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs. The study helped to broaden knowledge relating to the findings of the pilot study.

Purpose of the Study

A review of the literature on Christian students' experiences in secular mental health training programs produced little, if any, research that specifically addressed the experiences of Christians in secular counseling and counseling psychology programs (Gartner, 1986, Walker, 1978). Thus, there is a gap in the literature that needs to be filled. This study responded to the lack of information and the need for more exploratory research regarding the experiences of Christian students attending public, secular, counseling and counseling graduate programs. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to explore conservative orthodox Christian students' experiences while attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs and describe these experiences from the students' perspectives.

Research Question

The specific research question addressed was: What are the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students attending a public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate program? It was hoped that findings from this investigation would be used to add to the knowledge base regarding religion and mental health by providing a foundation from which other research could be conducted. In addition, it was hoped that these findings would create additional questions for future research and discussion.

Significance of the Study

Given the apparent discrepancy between the perceived importance of religious diversity as outlined by professional ethics and standards and the actual attention given to it (Zimmer-Souza, 1999), the pilot study, and the lack of literature, this study had the potential to contribute significantly to the literature base. The exploration of this area was necessary if counselors and counseling educators are to ensure fair and equitable treatment of persons of faith. In addition, the study provided valuable information regarding whether ethical standards were being followed and maintained. This research was important for those who wished to advocate for pluralism, tolerance, and respect for diversity of various cultural identities to promote personal and academic success in public universities. This research was also intended to inform counselor educators, other mental health professionals, supervisors, and counselors-in-training as to the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students while attending public secular accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were derived from secular and theological dictionaries and personal experience. These terms were defined according to their relevance to this study.

Bias - An inclination of the mind; a bent or prejudice for or against (Bergquist, 1981).

Christian - A follower who believes in Jesus Christ as God, His teachings, seeks to live in the ways He taught, and engages in Christian religious activities.

Counselor Educator - A trained professional who has earned a M.A., M.Ed., M.S., Ph.D. or Ed.D. in the field of counselor education.

Counseling Graduate Program - A master's level CACREP-accredited counseling training program.

Counseling Psychology Graduate Program – A doctoral level Committee on Accreditation (CoA) -accredited counseling psychology training program.

Ethical - Pertaining to morality; in agreement with rules for right conduct or practice (Bergquist, 1981).

Orthodox - traditional Christian beliefs that are accepted by Christian churches, often expressed in the traditional Apostles' and Nicene Creeds (McKim, 1996).

Religion - A particular system of faith in and worship of God (Bergquist, 1981).

Religious - Devoted to a religion, concerned or connected with a religion (Bergquist, 1981); allows for supernatural dimensions.

Secular - Relates thoughts, ideology, values, and actions to the empirical world in contrast to religious or supernatural dimensions (McKim, 1996).

Overview of Methodology

Because research specifically focused on this topic was lacking, a discovery-oriented approach was most appropriate. Qualitative methodology was appropriate to explore a phenomenon about which little was known (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thus, qualitative methodology was appropriate for the exploration of conservative orthodox Christian students' experiences in a public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs.

Phenomenology

Specifically, a phenomenological approach was the best method of study for this endeavor. The aim of phenomenology was to obtain an understanding of the nature and meaning of an experience of a particular group of participants (Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology answered the question: What was the meaning and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a group of people (Patton, 2002)? This discovery-oriented inductive approach was the first step in the overall inquiry process.

Role of the researcher

The researcher was an important participant in the research process. Recognizing that my own philosophical assumptions and presuppositions could have influenced data collection, analysis, and findings, it was important to describe and mitigate my biases (Patton, 2002). Whenever possible, my values and disposition were clearly communicated in order to facilitate the accurate representation of data and participant experiences (Creswell, 1994). I used various techniques (i.e., peer review, member checks) to help prevent my biases or assumptions from influencing the analytic outcome of findings.

Participants

Criterion sampling was used to enlist participants for the study. Criterion sampling required participants to meet specific parameters in order to best address the phenomenon (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For the purposes of this study, I selected seven participants who met criteria related to their status as conservative orthodox Christians and who were currently attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs (see Appendix F). Participants were chosen because of their personal experiences and knowledge as conservative orthodox Christian students.

Data Collection

Data were collected primarily through interviews and observations. A semi-structured interview format was used to help facilitate participation. Two individual interviews were conducted with each of the seven participants. Observations were maintained in a reflexive journal to record my thoughts and reactions to participant responses, as well as to record participants' non-verbal communication. The observations were used to place participants' responses into context. A final individual interview was conducted with four of the seven participants to ensure accuracy in data analysis and credibility of findings.

Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that phenomenologists extract participant experiences in data analysis through continual review of data and vigilance over the researcher's own presuppositions. In order to elicit the meaning of the participant responses, data were reduced into meaningful analyzable units. Meaningful chunks of data were then linked and developed into coherent units. Data displays were constructed,

to assist in data analysis and draw valid conclusions (Miles & Huberman). Within case and cross-case data displays were used to present participant data systematically and to explore and describe the phenomenon under investigation (Miles & Huberman).

Flexibility in design and analysis was necessary to study this phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The rationale behind the idea of flexibility was that it was impossible to predict exactly how respondents would interact in the moment or to know so much in advance about a phenomenon that all the details of the design and analysis could be planned. The emergent design and data analysis included a continuous and evolving process (Lincoln & Guba).

Trustworthiness

As is in any study, trustworthiness was important to ensure accuracy of findings. Trustworthiness examined issues such as the following: (a) to what degree can findings be attributed to participants' responses in context and not to a researcher's own biases and personal motivations, (b) how can researchers gain confidence in the accuracy of findings, (c) to what degree, if any, do findings have applicability in other contexts with other participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)?

Multiple steps were taken to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of findings. A professional qualitative researcher and peer reviewer reviewed transcripts, reduction of data, and summary of memorandums. The consultation with the professional researcher and peer reviewer helped explore alternative conclusions and assisted me to avoid imposing my biases on the findings as they emerged. Outliers and exceptions to common verbal responses were explored to curb against any bias. I maintained and reviewed a reflexive journal to achieve as much objectivity as possible. Member checks were

conducted to ensure accurate understanding of verbal and observed responses during the interviews. Finally, a concluding interview was conducted to determine whether the findings accurately reflected participants' shared experiences.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a general overview and foundation for the current research study. Relevant literature was reviewed to delineate the rationale, purpose, and significance of the study. Due to the lack of literature related to religious students' experiences in secular mental health programs, this study was exploratory research. Specifically, the investigation of conservative orthodox Christian students' experiences while attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs had been studied. Findings from this study may provide valuable information and contribute to the literature base related to religious persons and counseling.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to demonstrate how this investigation fit into the existing body of knowledge related to the topic of study. This literature review also helps to explain the rationale for undertaking this research project. Additionally, this chapter provides a summary of current knowledge and identified deficits in the literature.

Overview

Over the past several decades, there has been an increase in research and literature on the subject of spirituality and religion in counseling (Bergin, 1983; Gartner et al., 1991; Worthington, Kuru, McCullough, & Sandage, 1996). Some proposed explanations for the increase in literature include the following: (a) some religious individuals have wanted counselors who are similar to themselves; (b) there has been a rise in cults whose ex-members required counseling for reintegration into society; (c) immigration has influenced cultural diversity, and (d) global communication has produced an increased need for cultural education and collaboration (Hawkins, Tan, & Turk, 1999). Lewis-Hall and Hall (1997) attributed the increase in awareness of spiritual and religious dimensions in counseling in part to the 1992 inclusion of religion as an aspect of diversity in the American Psychological Association's Code of Ethics (APA, 1992) and spirituality as a V-code in the DSM IV as a means to address problems related to spirituality or religion (APA, 1994).

My experience and perception has been that various medical and mental healthcare professions have been showing an increased interest in assessing individuals

from a holistic perspective. Although general care professions in the West have had historical ties to religion, they have become secularized with the separation of observable phenomena belonging to secular science and its practitioners and spiritual matters belonging to theology and its practitioners (Dombeck & Karl, 1987; McCarthy, 1995). The holistic movement however advocates for the reintegration of observable and spiritual phenomena and care for the whole being of a person, as the observable and spiritual are viewed to affect each other.

Zinnbauer and Pargament (2000) have suggested that mental health professionals work from a particular view of religion and spiritual beliefs. Among these views and theoretical foundations are value-laden assumptions about people, the world, and the process of helping. These views affect implementation of specific counseling techniques, forms of assessment and diagnosis, exploration of client issues, and goals of the counseling relationship.

It is generally accepted that mental health professions grew from the medical model and psychology, which both have historical roots in secularism. Thus, the mental health professions' assumptions about people, the world, and the process of helping are traditionally viewed from a secular perspective. Secularism traditionally has held a *rejectionist* view toward religion and spiritual beliefs. The *rejectionist* stance holds that there is no God or supernatural force that exists, and that religion is an obstruction to healthy development and functioning (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000). Religiosity is viewed as a regression to an immature state or irrationality in which a person invents a supernatural helper to manage the anxieties of life or fear of death, or to avoid the process of decision making (Yalom, 1980). From this view, religion is a defense mechanism

distorting the world in order to cope with life's ambiguities, which must be dismantled if the client is to become well (Ellis 1980; Freud, 1927). Examples of the *rejectionist* view might be orthodox psychoanalysis, some cognitive-behavioral therapies, and atheistic existentialism.

The criticism of the *rejectionist* view is that it denies the legitimacy of spiritual or religious possibilities, and therefore it can only view religion and spiritual matters as pathological. Denying the legitimacy of spiritual and religious possibilities and viewing religious and spiritual matters as pathological creates potential for ethical misconduct and devaluation of all persons who are religiously or spiritually committed. If the behavioral sciences indeed have their foundation in a secular, *rejectionist* stance, it would make sense that there would be a bias against the religiously committed, as the *rejectionist* stance is opposed to that commitment. However, herein lies a problem. The ACA (2005) and several of its divisions are clear in recognizing religiously committed persons in their conceptual view of diversity and have mandated ethical treatment for those individuals. Although the mental health field has undergone change with a modern leaning toward a humanistic worldview, bias might still be found against religiously committed persons. It has been my hope that the study of conservative orthodox Christian students attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs could lead to increased dialogue among members of various disciplines concerned with religious and mental health issues.

Mental Health Training and Religious Diversity

It has been reported that 92% of 113,000 participants surveyed in the United States are associated with a religion (Kosmin & Lachman, 1993). A Gallop Poll reported

that, of 1,000 individuals surveyed in the United States, 55% believe religion to be a very important aspect of their lives (Polling Report, 2004). According to Melton (1991), there are 1,588 faith groups in the United States and Canada. It appears that faith is clearly an important aspect of many people's lives.

The code of ethics for the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2005) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2001) are clear in stating the importance of diversity in training counselors. Religion is specifically addressed as part of our diverse society within the Social and Cultural Foundations Standard (CACREP, 2001). In addition, CACREP-accredited programs must specifically address religion as an area to be taught to meet standards; yet, Kelly (1997) found that 20 of 42 (48%) surveyed CACREP programs did not address religion and spirituality as part of the curriculum. In addition, Kelly (1994) found that only 56 of 343 surveyed counselor education programs had courses addressing spirituality and religion and that state institutions gave less attention to these issues than religious institutions. Only 15 of 60 (33%) CACREP-accredited programs promoted incorporating religious beliefs and practices in intake procedures when assessing clients (Pate & High, 1995). Specifically, a CACREP graduate preparation program survey indicated 69% of the programs addressed religious and spiritual concerns, but only 46% of CACREP contacts perceived themselves as prepared to integrate spiritual and religious material related to counseling into teaching and supervision activities (Young, Cashwell, Craig, Wiggins-Frame, & Belaire, 2002). The same survey also reported that only 28% of respondents perceived colleagues as capable of addressing religious and spiritual issues as a component of counselor preparation.

Findings in related mental health fields have offered similar results. For example, results of a survey indicated that counseling psychology programs offered relatively little formal course work in religious or spiritual matters (Schulte, Skinner, & Claiborn, 2002). Another study indicated that 81% of surveyed programs in clinical psychology had no formal religious diversity training despite guidelines of the American Psychological Association for religious diversity training (Reyes, 2002).

Although a majority of the population appears to hold religion and spirituality as important in some fashion, these findings (Reyes, 2002; Schulte et al., 2002) may suggest that counselors are not receiving adequate training in spiritual and religious diversity, how to respond to this diversity, or the variables that influence client spirituality and religion (Hickson et al., 2000). These findings may also suggest bias against religious persons (Hickson et al.; Reyes; Schulte et al.). As Zimmer-Souza (1999) suggested, there appears to be a discrepancy between the perceived importance of religious diversity as outlined by professional ethics and standards and the actual attention given to it.

Studies (Hickson et al., 2000; Kelly, 1994; Prest, Russel & D'Souza, 1999) found that the majority of trainees held religion and spirituality as being important. In contrast, Pate and High (1995) reported that only 16 % of CACREP-accredited program department heads surveyed affirmed that religious beliefs were an important part of counselor awareness. Because department heads play a critical role in program structure and curriculum, this finding may help explain the lack of attention in training related to religious diversity in counseling. In relation to graduate students with a religious orientation, Gartner (1986) found professors were more likely to admit applicants into graduate psychology programs if they made no mention of religion as compared to

applicants who identified themselves as conservative Protestant Christians, even though all other conditions were equal. However, this was a pilot study and interpretations need to be made carefully.

The counseling community has made efforts in advocating for diversity in regards to gender, age, race, and ethnicity, but appears to have been slow to address issues for people of faith. Commentators have suggested that the counseling community would not be content if these findings were in regards to race, gender, or other areas of diversity (Pate & Bondi, 1992; Pate & High, 1995). A thoughtful inclusion of religious and spiritual issues in the core curriculum has been suggested as reasonable to prepare counselors to work ethically and effectively with religious and spiritual issues in secular settings (Burke, Hackney, Hudson, Miranti, Watts, & Epp, 1999).

Religious Persons and Mental Health

Is there an empirical basis for maintaining a bias against religious persons? Are religious persons neurotic, irrational, or more likely to have mental health problems? There does not appear to be support for the preconception that religiosity is necessarily correlated with psychopathology (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Bergin, 1983; Gartner et al., 1991; Levin & Vanderpool, 1987; Worthington et al., 1996). Bergin's review of 24 empirical studies showed a positive relationship between religiosity and mental health in 47% of the studies, no relationship in 30%, and a negative relationship in 23%. After a review of 148 empirical studies, Worthington et al. (1996) concluded that religion did not affect mental health in a negative way and in fact appeared to have a positive relationship to mental health. Levin and Vanderpool (1987) indicated that 22 of 27 studies found religious attendance to be positively correlated with physical health. Four of these 27

studies reported insignificant results. Although there appeared to be an overall trend toward religion being positively correlated with mental and physical health, the reviews were not conclusive.

Gartner et al. (1991) reviewed over 200 studies and discovered several trends. For example, the majority of studies that attempted to measure theoretical constructs linking religion to psychopathology have been pencil and paper personality instruments and, as a result, there have been concerns related to the validity and reliability of the instruments used. When research did correlate psychopathology with religiosity, it was related to individuals who possessed characteristics of authoritarianism, dependence, dogmatism, lack of tolerance for ambiguity, rigidity, and lack of self-actualization. In contrast, researchers have suggested that behavioral measures are better related to mental health than attitudinal measures. Gartner et al. suggested that studies that linked religion to positive physical or mental health have involved observations of behavior, such as improved physical health, decreased alcohol and drug usage, a sense of emotional well being, reduced divorce rates and increased overall marital satisfaction, lower mortality rates, lower suicide rates, fewer delinquency problems, and lower depression rates.

Researchers must also make distinctions between factors such as religious orientation, which accounted for some inconsistent findings (Gartner et al., 1991). For example, people with an *intrinsic* religious orientation live their beliefs with religion as an end in itself, whereas people with an *extrinsic* religious orientation use religion for personal or social gain with religion as a means to an end (Allport, 1967). Thus, research findings may be forming conclusions based on religious orientation rather than religious beliefs or practice.

Explanations have been offered to clarify mixed results found in research (Gartner et al., 1991). For example, many of the completed studies have methodological flaws and although methodology is improving, many studies that pertained to religion and mental health have been simple and did not account for confounding variables. As stated earlier, religious orientation may be a factor in explaining inconsistent findings related to religiosity and mental health. For example, Donahue (1985) conducted a review and meta-analysis of religion and mental health studies and found an intrinsic religious orientation correlated with mental health, whereas an extrinsic orientation was associated with mental health difficulties. Studies also have failed to differentiate among other potential factors such as differences in religious traditions, geographical areas, and gender.

It is also possible that some research or surveys are inherently biased in their constructs. Bergin (1983) has suggested that many surveys reflect a *non-theistic* orientation that defines mental health from the author's *non-theistic* worldview. For example, Gartner et al. (1991) found some psychological tests rate religious values of humility, self-discipline, and obedience negatively, whereas humanistic values of high regard for self and assertiveness are rated positively. Watson, Folbrecht, Morris, and Hood (1990) examined irrationalities and religiosity. Watson et al. stated that a Rational-Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT) perspective considers *dependency* as irrational. However, they found that *dependency* from a religious perspective was rational and thus incongruent with REBT's individualistic, hedonistic (pleasure seeking-pain avoidance) value system. Worthington, Dupont, Berry, and Duncan (1988) suggested that religious people view the world from a different perspective, so what a secular counselor may label

unhealthy conceptually may actually be desired by a religious person. Thus, counselors may be culturally insensitive.

Some evidence exists that mental health professionals sometimes display bias against religious clients, perhaps inadvertently (Blazer, 1998). Danesi (2003) has suggested that persons who are politically or religiously conservative experience discrimination. Worthington et al. (1996) have recommended that counselors must learn methods to distinguish between what is considered *pathology* and *normal* or strongly held religious beliefs. Distinguishing between *pathology* and *normal* or strongly held beliefs may ensure counselors are respecting the diversity of religious expression and not violating ethical standards by engaging in discriminatory practices by promoting change that is not valued by a religious person.

Pastoral Counseling

Over the past century, pastoral counseling has developed into a discipline that has helped to mediate between the sometimes competing secular and religious worldviews as they relate to counseling. Pastoral counseling is spiritually integrated counseling that requires graduate level and clinical training in counseling, as well as graduate education in religious studies (Woodruff, 2002). Likewise, training in pastoral counseling seeks the same clinical competencies as mental health practitioners while emphasizing spiritual and theological dimensions of counseling work (Giblin & Barz, 1993).

Pastoral care and counseling have grown to be an effective and accepted practice across theological, psychological, and counseling professions (Eliason, Hanley & Leventis, 2001). However, Power (1990) suggested that if pastoral counseling is to achieve an identity that is satisfying to both theologians and secular practitioners, pastoral

counselors must resolve the dilemma between the predominately humanistic values of the psychological community and the theological values of the religious community.

Tisdale (2003) suggested that training has only just begun to include religion and spirituality as an area of diversity education and has suggested increased dialogue across broader disciplines. The dialogue among various practitioners will provide an opportunity for increased understanding about the process of change as it applies to those with religious and psychological interests (Moon, 2002).

Potential Problems of Worldview Dissonance

All academic disciplines and professions have historical foundations in certain epistemological, philosophical, and theoretical presuppositions. The modern mental health professions in the West were founded on and developed from *non-theistic* presuppositions and a logical positivist epistemology. Non-theistic presuppositions and a logical positivist epistemology can give rise to conflict with persons who hold to a theistic worldview and an epistemology other than logical positivism. Scholars need to recognize the overlap in interests and methods when approaching religion and mental health and engage in more interdisciplinary conversation (Meyers, 2004).

When approaching religion and mental health, ethical standards mandate that counseling educators be sensitive to diversity in regards to religious and spiritual persons and that trainees be prepared to be sensitive to them as well. Research findings have suggested that counselors are not receiving adequate training in regards to religious diversity (Reyes, 2002; Schulte, Skinner & Claiborn, 2002). Possible explanations for these findings may include a lack of perceived importance in the leadership of counseling

programs and a possible historical bias in behavioral sciences against religious persons and worldviews.

If a bias does exist, it does not appear to be founded on empirical evidence. The majority of evidence appears to favor a positive relationship between mental health and religion. However, results are not conclusive and more studies need to be conducted. Future studies should control for potential confounding variables such as types of religiousness, religious tradition, gender, and geographical region. In addition, constructs and the theories from which they are derived need to be culturally sensitive and reviewed for possible biases inherent in the worldview from which they are derived.

All counselors have potential to act unethically based on their own biases. Just as religious counselors may promote changes in non-religious persons that are not valued by these clients and therefore act unethically, Bergin (1980) stated that there is a danger that secular counselors who act as moralists promoting secular values may promote changes not valued by religious persons or communities and thereby act unethically. Some evidence suggests that there is a decline in traditional religious beliefs with increased clinical training and experience (Harman, 2002). The decline in traditional religious beliefs may suggest students' religious beliefs are being influenced during training. The study of conservative orthodox Christian students attending a public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate program may be able to provide insight as to potential problems experienced from sometimes opposing worldviews.

Conclusion

Religious and spiritual concerns are an important area of diversity that should not be neglected, if counselors are to serve people for their own benefit in helping them

achieve their own goals. Counseling professionals may not agree with individuals' positions in relation to religious convictions and values; however, counselors are called to try to understand religious persons and help them achieve their own goals. In order to ensure fair and equitable treatment of religiously diverse individuals, it will be important for counselors and counseling educators to participate in awareness training and advocate for religious clients and trainees in counseling programs, workshops, texts, and society. As leaders in diversity issues, helping professionals have an ethical obligation to advocate for religious and spiritual sensitivity. By conducting this study, I hoped to contribute to the literature, stimulate thought, and continue the dialog concerning religious and spiritual diversity in counseling and mental health.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Rationale for the Study

Current ethical standards outlined in the ACA (2005) Code of Ethics mandate that counselors are to respect the diversity of persons of faith and should not discriminate based on a person's religion. In addition, CACREP (2001) standards maintain that religious and spiritual literature is to be included in counseling programs. The literature should provide an understanding of the cultural context of relationships and issues and trends in society as cultural contexts and trends relate to the diversity of religious and spiritual values. Training program objectives and curriculum should ensure that flexibility is provided within the program's curriculum to accommodate individual differences in student knowledge and competencies, and to advocate for students where institutional and social barriers impede equal access, equity, and success for all. Students in mental health counseling programs should be able to demonstrate knowledge and skills related to aspects of religious and spiritual beliefs and equal treatment in counseling.

In contrast, some traditional dominant schools of psychological thought and mental health historically have been inclined to view religiosity as an impediment to healthy mental and emotional functioning (Ellis 1980; Freud, 1961; Yalom, 1980). More recently, Ellis has softened his position towards religious persons (Nielsen & Ellis, 1994). After reviewing the professional literature, Gartner (1985) suggested that a bias against traditionally religious persons exists in the field of psychology. However, reviews of the literature have demonstrated that viewing religiosity as an impediment to healthy mental

and emotional functioning is not supported by sound empirical research (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Bergin, 1983; Gartner et al., 1991; Levin & Vanderpool, 1987; Worthington et al., 1996). Holding religiosity as an impediment to healthy functioning is probably due more to personal presuppositions and philosophical dispositions. Thus, maintaining religiosity as an unhealthy attribute appears inconsistent with the literature and may be at odds with concepts of multiculturalism and with ethical guidelines and standards.

Given traditional views of dominant theorists in the mental health field, perceiving religiosity as an unhealthy impediment spurs the questions: (a) Is religious diversity respected in counseling training programs? (b) Is there fair and equitable treatment in counseling training programs for religiously diverse individuals? and (c) Are ethical guidelines and standards being met in counseling training programs with regards to religious persons? A review of the literature produced only one study related to ethical guidelines, standards, and implications regarding a religious person's experiences in a mental health academic program. Findings of the study showed that male Protestants who mentioned their Protestant Christian affiliation were less likely to be admitted into a graduate mental health program (Gartner, 1986). However, this was only a pilot study. The results must be interpreted with caution and there is a need for further research regarding this contention.

Due to the lack of literature in this area, a study exploring the experiences of conservative orthodox Christians attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs could provide useful information regarding their experiences as they relate to current ethical standards and guidelines and could lead

to further research in the area of religious diversity. Consequently, this study attempted to describe the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students who attended public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs. In order to explore and describe the lived experiences of conservative orthodox Christians in public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs, qualitative methodology seemed most appropriate.

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

Straus and Corbin (1998) have stated that qualitative research is any type of research that does not use statistical procedures to arrive at conclusions regarding findings. Qualitative research is often utilized to explore areas about which little is known (Stern, 1980). Qualitative research also allows for the study of an issue in depth without predetermined categories (Patton, 2002).

There was little research and literature in the area of religious students' experiences in secular counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs. Thus, qualitative methodology was appropriate for the exploration of the conservative orthodox Christian students' experiences in public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs.

Rationale for Phenomenology

Patton (2002) describes phenomenology as a means or method of:
exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning. This requires methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people

experience a specific phenomenon - how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others. (p. 104)

The goal of phenomenology is to gain an understanding of the nature and meaning of the everyday experience (Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology answers questions related to the meaning of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a group of people (Patton, 2002). Thus, phenomenological procedures can provide the essence and lived experiences of a specific group in a particular context, in this case, conservative orthodox Christians attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs.

The purpose of this investigation was to explore and capture the experiences of conservative orthodox Christians attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs by using phenomenological procedures. Findings from this study may lead to other studies concerning religious persons attending secular counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs. Findings may also reveal issues specific to ethics and policies of tolerance, respect for diversity, non-discriminatory practices, and research questions pertaining to multicultural practices in the field of counseling and counseling psychology.

Assumptions of the Researcher

For the purposes of this research, I assumed, like Lincoln and Guba (1985), that there are multiple realities. A quantitative approach generally presupposes paradigms that characterize the world as containing observable, measurable facts. In contrast, a qualitative approach is generally supported by a constructivist paradigm that depicts a world that is socially constructed and always evolving (Glense, 1999). Patton (2002) has

stated that phenomenology, a qualitative approach, presumes that persons can know only what they experience by focusing on their perceptions and the meanings they make of those perceptions. Although a person receives objective sensory data, it becomes experience as he or she subjectively interprets the data. Because it is the person's subjective experiences that determine reality (Patton), research participants' subjective experience was the focus of this study.

In addition to obtaining subjective participant perceptions, it was also important to examine my own subjective perceptions and assumptions. Disclosing my perceptions helped to communicate my assumptions and aided in searching for alternative explanations of participant data during analysis. This investigation is grounded in my personal experiences, professional motivation to expand upon my experiences, and a desire to add relevant empirical literature in an area where I perceived there was a need.

The concept of this study emerged as I reflected on my personal experiences, reviewed the literature, conducted a pilot study, and had informal talks with peers and professors. While completing a master's degree in counseling at a public secular university, I underwent a conversion experience over a two-year period. My worldview changed from a secular humanistic perspective with liberal values to an orthodox Christian perspective with conservative values. Before my conversion, as I interacted with peers and professors, and read professional literature, I perceived my secular ideology and liberal values as being encouraged, valued, and reinforced. In contrast, I perceived my post-conversion, Christian ideology and conservative values as discouraged, not valued, and mocked by some students and professors. For example, my

ideology and values were ridiculed at times, and thus I learned that my views were not to be expressed and were not valued by others.

In light of the ACA (2005) ethical standards that require that counselors respect diversity and practice tolerance and due to the courses I completed in multiculturalism, I experienced cognitive dissonance. If educators and counseling trainees were to practice tolerance, respect religious diversity, and be flexible with regard to various value systems, I did not understand why I perceived a lack of tolerance and respect for my conservative values and Christian beliefs and worldview.

As I struggled with my dissonance, I began to read relevant literature in an attempt to make sense of my experiences. Some literature appeared to conclude that religiosity was an impediment to healthy mental and emotional functioning (Ellis, 1980; Freud, 1961; Yalom, 1980). However, this position appeared to be unfounded. Affirmations that religiosity was an impediment to healthy functioning were attributed more to the theorists' personal presuppositions and philosophical prejudice than to any conclusive supporting literature. I assumed that traditional, dominant, theoretical views that propose that religiosity is an impediment to healthy mental and emotional functioning may have manifested during formal training and impacted in some negative fashion the conservative orthodox Christian student's experience in public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs.

Based on that presumption, I assumed that a conservative orthodox Christian would have a qualitatively different experience as a student in a secular counseling graduate program as compared to a student who was not a conservative orthodox Christian. In addition to personal experiences, informal conversations with peers and

faculty members had also confirmed either a perception or possession of a negative disposition or bias toward religious students and their ideology and values. The informal conversations supplemented my assumption that some form of negative impact would manifest itself as part of the conservative orthodox Christian student's experience in a public, secular, counseling or counseling psychology graduate program, and that the Christian student's experience would be qualitatively unique.

Methods to Address Researcher Bias

The researcher is an important participant in gathering data. Patton (2002) has asserted that totally value-free research is impossible, and it is important to try to mitigate how personal values and preconceptions may affect collection and analysis of data. Whenever possible, my values and disposition were clearly communicated in order to facilitate the accurate representation of data and participant experiences (Creswell, 1994). I used various triangulation techniques to help prevent influencing the analytic outcome of findings.

Triangulation

Triangulation works under the premise that no single source of data collection or analysis reveals a phenomenon in full; thus, using various techniques for collection and analysis guards against researcher bias and increases credibility of findings (Patton, 2002). Specific techniques that I used in the investigation included (a) journaling reflections related to interviews, analysis, and findings, (b) reviewing analysis and initial findings with members for further detail and clarification, (c) consultation with a qualitative research expert and peer reviewer, (d) seeking alternative explanations and experiences during interviews, and (f) a concluding findings review interview. These

techniques were employed to ensure that I remained open and sensitive when interpreting and reporting data. Likewise, these techniques ideally ensured that findings authentically exhibited the true essence of the participants' experiences being studied.

Participants

Attempts to understand a particular group of people's experiences involves contact with those individuals during field work (Straus & Corbin, 1998). The design of qualitative research is to purposefully select participants who will best answer the research question (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, there was no attempt to randomly select participants as might have been done in a quantitative study. Purposeful sampling was used. Strauss and Corbin have explained that purposeful sampling is a technique in which sites and participants are specifically chosen in order to study participants who meet study criteria in a particular context.

Essential to this study was the participation of key informants, participants who were knowledgeable in the area being studied and who had relevant experiences to share (Patton, 2002). The participants in this study consisted of a purposeful sample of conservative orthodox Christian students attending a public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs. Finally, students were from accredited universities and colleges in the south-central region of the United States of America. Access to the students was gained through e-mail solicitation and from coordination with faculty members at the selected institutions. I sent a solicitation e-mail to three different institutions and asked that it be distributed to all the current students in the counseling and counseling psychology programs database. Twelve students responded to the call for participants.

The sample selected was based on the students' interest in volunteering for the study, meeting study criteria (see Appendix F), and a willingness to share their experiences. Creswell (1998) has suggested that a minimum of 10 participants lend credibility to a study. Therefore, I attempted to gain a total of 10 participants to include in the study; however only seven students met study criteria. Participant profiles were collected and written at the beginning of data collection.

Part of my role as researcher was to ensure that participants were treated in an ethical manner as outlined in the ACA Code of Ethics (2005), as well as to follow safeguards provided by the University of New Orleans Committee on the Use of Human Subjects. I ensured that participant information was kept confidential. Audio-tapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet for seven years following the conclusion of this study. A copy of the Human Subjects Review Approval is included (Appendix A).

Participants were told that the study was part of my dissertation research. Participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary, the information received from them would be held in confidence, and their responses would remain confidential. The selected participants were notified that all interviews would be audio taped and transcribed for use in data analysis, and that dissertation committee members could listen to audio-tapes or read transcripts for all interviews. Participants were asked to refrain from discussing their interviews or the research to reduce influencing responses of other participants. Respondents were required to sign consent forms and were informed that they could withdraw from participation at any time.

Religious participants

It was difficult to define religious persons and measure religious commitment. In general, religious participants have been defined by measuring their degree of participation in religious activities, belief in traditional religious creeds, attitudes pertaining to the importance of religious experiences, and factors such as intrinsic versus extrinsic religious orientation (Gartner, et. al, 1991). For the purposes of this research, I attempted to include various factors to define the religious participant and develop participant criteria.

First, participants affirmed belief in conservative orthodox Christian teachings and doctrine. I specified conservative orthodox beliefs, because orthodox beliefs are considered the basic Christian beliefs that are accepted by most Christian churches (McKim, 1996). Orthodox beliefs are often expressed in the traditional Apostles and Nicene Creeds, emphasizing a God-centered worldview. In contrast, persons holding to liberal beliefs approach Christian teachings in modern terms, emphasizing a human-centered worldview. A liberal view of the Christian faith seemed closer in proximity to a secular humanistic perspective when compared to traditional orthodox Christian beliefs. Thus, I assumed less divergence between a liberal Christian student's experiences while attending a secular counseling or counseling psychology program as compared to a conservative orthodox Christian student's experiences while attending a secular counseling or counseling psychology program.

Second, participants affirmed active participation in religious activities. Active participation in religious activities helped confirm the religious commitment of participants through behavior. The literature did not delineate a generally accepted rate

of frequency for participation in religious activities in order to define a religious person. I defined the rate of frequency in terms of affirmation of regular church attendance, prayer, and Bible study. The term *regular* was defined as engaging in a religious activity at least one time per week.

In addition, participants must have assigned a high degree of importance to their religious experience and involvement. Assigning a high degree of importance to religious experience and involvement helped confirm the religious commitment of participants in thought, and helped distinguish between the casual observer of the Christian faith and the devout follower of the Christian faith.

Data Collection

Data were collected primarily through individual interviews and observations. Three rounds of individual interviews were attempted with each of the participants. Data collection took place in secluded locations within university settings and public libraries with the exception of one interview conducted in a coffee shop. Participants were located throughout the south-central region of the United States. Due to summer vacations, travel concerns, time limitations, an e-mail error, and possibly general research participant attrition rates, only four of the seven participants completed the final interview.

A professional transcriptionist transcribed all audiotapes. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Data were collected over a five-month period to allow ample time for analysis, verification, and follow-up. A semi-structured interview format was used to help facilitate the process. An interview guide was developed based on participant data for use in the subsequent interviews to explore experiences in depth.

Initial data analysis occurred between each interview to facilitate the development, emergence and verification of categories, themes and descriptors, to reduce data into coherent units, and to generate questions for follow up interviews.

Interview Questions

Initially, interview questions were broad and general. Broad questions served to facilitate participant responses that were spontaneous. Likewise, general questions assisted in credibility of data reports and reduced the potential of leading responses in any particular direction. Subsequent interview questions were defined as data emerged and evolved into relevant themes and categories. The following questions served as the initial stimuli for data collection. These questions and follow up questions were used to explore the experiences of conservative orthodox Christians attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs:

- (1) How would you describe your experiences as a conservative orthodox Christian in a secular counseling graduate program?
- (2) How would you describe your experiences with peers and faculty?
- (3) In general, how would you describe your reactions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in response to your experiences?

Observations were maintained in a reflexive journal to record my thoughts and reactions to participant responses, as well as to record participants' non-verbal communication. The observations were used to place participant responses in context.

A final interview was conducted to ensure researcher accuracy in data analysis. The final interview was conducted over a 60 to 90 minute period. The final interview

allowed for member checking to increase confidence in the analysis and to ensure that the patterns developed were true to participant experience (Patton, 2002).

Follow-up Interview Questions

Follow up questions for each interview were developed from each preceding round of interviews. Questions included in the second round of interviews were: (a) You've had one month to reflect on the first interview. Is there anything you'd like to add? (b) How would you describe your expectations as a Christian coming into a secular program? (c) Assuming you maintain a theistic worldview, beliefs, and values, how do you reconcile and incorporate learning from your secular program? (d) Some participants reported others had negative perceptions or misperceptions of Christians or Christianity. Do you think this occurs? If so why? (e) How do you think negative perceptions or misperceptions of Christians or Christianity affect their education and counseling experience? (f) What do you think accounts for participants who stated they haven't had any negative experiences and reported only positive experiences? (g) How have you maintained your Christian identity while attending a secular program? (h) How have you coped with any difficult experiences? (i) What is the appropriate/inappropriate context and manner to discuss Christian beliefs/values in your program? (j) How do you respond to participants who reported they were labeled closed-minded when they disclosed their beliefs/values, and why do you think this occurred? (k) How has or has your Christian identity changed while in a secular program? (l) What's it been like to talk to me here? and (m) Is there anything else you would like add or believe is relevant to the information you have provided?

Third round interview questions were primarily focused on ensuring accuracy of findings in the first and second round interviews. Third round interview questions were: (a) Are there any changes you would like to make to the category or theme names or do they accurately fit for you, (b) Having read through the findings, do you have any initial thoughts, general reactions, or is there anything that stands out to you, (c) Do the findings accurately reflect your experiences, (e) Is there anything you would like to add, change or clarify, and (f) Is there anything else that you think is important that you would like to express?

Data Analysis Procedures

Miles and Huberman (1994) explained that phenomenologists extract participant experience in data analysis through continual review of data emergence and vigilance over the researcher's own presuppositions. For this investigation, data were reviewed, reduced, and then analyzed through the use of data displays.

Data review

I read and reviewed transcripts, along with my researcher's journal multiple times at the onset of analysis to familiarize myself with the participants' experiences. I continually examined transcripts during analysis to assist in understanding and to facilitate future interviews. In order to elicit the meaning of the participant responses, data were reduced into meaningful analyzable units (Atkinson & Coffey, 1996).

Data reduction

Once audiotapes were transcribed, meaningful sections of data were then underlined within the transcribed data, linked, and separated into clusters of meaning. These clusters were then organized into themes or categories. This process was repeated

for each interview with each participant to reduce data into coherent units. Units of data were then compared across participants and reorganized as required (Seidman, 1998).

Data displays

Data displays were developed to present the data systematically, to assist in data analysis, and to draw conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Specifically, within case and cross-case data displays were used in my analysis of participant experiences.

Within case analysis and displays

Within case data displays were constructed to present information systematically, in a visual format, to enable the researcher to draw valid conclusions from the individual interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Within case displays were also used to facilitate exploration and description of the phenomenon under investigation (Miles & Huberman). There are no standard formats for display, thus the format used depended on the type of data provided by participants. Based upon the type of data obtained from participants, the type of display created was conceptually ordered. Displays consisted of relevant concepts, themes or categories, quotes, data memorandums, and a summary of data and relevance of data memorandums.

Cross-case analysis and display

To assist in generalizability appropriate to qualitative study, in deepening understanding, and in finding the essence of participants' experiences, cross-case analysis was conducted (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A cross case display was constructed comparing relevant concepts, themes, or categories across participant interviews. The type of cross-case display that was constructed depended upon the type of data obtained. The displays consisted of relevant concepts, themes or categories, individual participants'

comments as they related to themes, data summary memorandums, and a summary of data and relevance of data memorandums. Once data reduction had been performed and within-case and cross-case analysis was conducted, findings were checked via verification procedures and eventually were summarized.

There was some flexibility in design and analysis, thus enabling the possibility for change which was an essential component in the study of this phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Originally, my goal was to study participants in the field of counselor education from CACREP accredited programs; however only five participants who responded were attending counselor education programs. By amending the pool of participants to include students from CoA accredited counseling psychology programs, two additional participants were obtained. The two additional participants graduated previously from CACREP-accredited masters level counseling programs.

Although the original design called for a concluding focus group, a third interview was used. Due to summer vacations, time constraints, travel, and e-mail error, I was not able to coordinate a time that participants could met for a focus group. To increase credibility of findings, a concluding interview was used to review findings and obtain participant feedback related to findings.

Verification Procedures

As is true for any study, trustworthiness was important to ensure accuracy in findings. For a qualitative study, it was important to engage in activities that would increase the probability that credible findings and interpretations were presented. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When initiating this investigation, the major concerns were that I might superimpose my biases and develop my own conclusions regarding data, thus

findings might not accurately reflect participants' experiences. Accordingly, several steps were taken to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of data to ensure that findings reported were based on participants' experiences and not my biases. A professional qualitative researcher, a researcher with a Ph.D. in Counselor Education with a specialization in qualitative research, and a peer reviewer reviewed transcripts, reduction of data, and summary of memorandums in order to explore alternative conclusions and to assist me in bracketing my biases. Outliers and exceptions to usual verbal responses were explored to curb against inaccurate reporting of data and to assist in developing holistic findings. In addition, recognizing that data are subjective, I maintained and reviewed a reflexive journal to achieve as much objectivity as possible. To ensure that findings accurately reflected participants' experiences, member checks were also conducted throughout the interviews. Member checks were used to ensure accurate understanding of verbal and observed responses during the interviews. Likewise, a final interview was conducted in which the reduction of data and findings were shared with participants to determine whether the findings accurately reflected their experiences. Although generalizability in the traditional quantitative sense was not expected to be achieved for this study, ensuring the credibility of findings facilitated the possibility of transferability of the findings for future research in context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the research methodology. The rationale for the study as well as specifics regarding the phenomenological approach that was utilized throughout this investigation of the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students attending public, secular,

accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs were presented.

The assumptions of the paradigm and researcher biases were delineated, and the role of the researcher was clarified. In addition, data collection procedures, participant selection procedures, interview questions, and analysis procedures were discussed. Finally, verification procedures were defined to ensure the credibility of findings and transferability to future studies.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings that emerged from participants' responses to the research question: what are the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs? The results presented in this chapter reflect my analysis and interpretation of data collected in the form of (a) observations of each participant, (b) three rounds of individual interviews, (c) a reflective journal, (d) reviews of data analysis by a faculty research advisor and peer reviewer, and (e) my personal knowledge of being an orthodox conservative Christian attending a public, secular, counseling graduate program.

This chapter is arranged into five main sections. The first section is an introduction to the participants who shared their experiences and contributed to this investigation. The second section includes initial interview questions, themes, and categories that emerged from analysis of participants' responses, and a summary of the data that emerged from the first round of interviews. The third section of this chapter follows the same format and includes questions that were asked during the second round of individual interviews, as well as the themes that emerged from participants' responses during this round of follow up interviews. Details about a third and final round of individual interviews, wherein participants were presented with a summary of the overall findings that emerged from the analysis of participants' collective responses, is presented

in the fourth section of this chapter. The fifth section of this chapter includes verification procedures.

Participant Profiles

Participant profiles were developed to provide detailed descriptions of each person who volunteered for this study. Information utilized to create participant profiles was derived from individual interviews and demographics collected for each participant at the beginning of the study (see appendix E). Participants were given aliases derived from the Bible, and their academic settings were kept confidential. Profiles are presented as a group to provide a summary of demographics. A detailed description of each participant follows the group profile.

Group Profile

General demographic information was compiled on the seven individuals who chose to participate in this study, and a visual representation of the participant sample (Table 1) was established. Five of the seven participants were female. Six of the participants reported being Caucasian. One participant reported being Hispanic. All the participants fit the criteria for selection for this investigation which included (a) being enrolled in a public, secular, accredited counseling or counseling psychology graduate program, (b) identifying self as a Christian and affirming the Nicene Creed, (c) participating in prayer, Christian church attendance, and Bible reading at least one time per week, (d) identifying self as having conservative theological beliefs, as opposed to liberal theological beliefs, and (e) designating “9-10 very important” on a Likert type scale of 1-10 to describe the importance of their religious beliefs and involvement.

Table 1

Participant Group Profile

	Alias	Ethnicity & Gender	Age	Religious Denomination	Time in Secular Program	Religion/ Spirituality Courses Taken in program	Religion/ Spirituality Courses Offered in Program	Frequency of Prayer	Frequency of Church Attendance	Frequency of Bible Reading
1	Matthew	Caucasian Male	29	Assembly of God	9 Months	None	None	5	2	6
2	Peter	Hispanic Male	51	Catholic	1 Year	None	None	7	1	7
3	Rebecca	Caucasian Female	22	Baptist, Methodist or Non- Denominational	7 Months	None	None	7	1	5
4	Leah	Caucasian Female	27	Episcopalian	8 Months	None	None	25	1	4
5	Elizabeth	Caucasian Female	50	Baptist	4 Years and 9 Months	None	None	2 +	2	4-5
6	Chloe	Caucasian Female	28	Southern Baptist	7 Months	None	Yes	12	3	6
7	Sarah	Caucasian Female	25	Baptist	1 Year and 6 Months	None	Yes	14	3	7

As outlined in Table 1, participants were between 22 and 51 years of age. All participants were attending a public, secular, accredited counseling or counseling psychology graduate program. Three participants possessed a master's degree in counseling. Two earned their master's degrees at a Baptist seminary and were working toward a doctorate in counseling psychology. Five participants were working toward a master's degree in counselor education. Initial contact with all participants occurred through e-mail.

Matthew and Peter attended the same counselor education program and reported that they had not taken any courses in religion or spirituality and none were offered in their program. Rebecca, Leah and Elizabeth also attended the same program and reported they had not taken any courses in religion or spirituality and none were offered in their program. Chloe and Sarah attended the same seminary while pursuing their master's degree in counseling and the same public, secular, doctoral program in counseling psychology. Chloe and Sarah reported that religion and spirituality were integrated into all of their courses in their master's counseling program at the seminary. Chloe and Sarah also reported that they had not attended any courses in religion or spirituality in their doctoral program, but the courses were available.

Individual Profiles

This section contains descriptions or individual profiles of each of the seven participants who were involved in this investigation. These profiles are intended to introduce the participants, as well as the context in which this investigation took place. Participant profiles consist of a general description of the interview settings and personal characteristics regarding each of the participants, using information gleaned from

demographic forms that were completed during initial interactions with participants, data collected during interviews, and follow up e-mails. Participants were told that the purpose of the interviews was to describe their experiences as accurately as possible. Participants were reminded that there were no right or wrong answers and that they could talk about whatever was important for them. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were invited to reflect upon their experiences. These reflections were also incorporated in analysis of data.

Participant #1: Matthew

Matthew was a 29-year-old Caucasian male. He had been attending a public, secular, counselor education graduate program for approximately 9 months. He described himself as a conservative Christian who identified with the Assembly of God denomination. He reported that he had been a Christian for 15 years with 9 years being truly dedicated. He described his religious experience and involvement as very important. He reported attending church two times per week, praying five times per week, and reading the Bible six times per week.

After going through the participant selection process, Matthew and I met for the first time at his university's career center conference room which contained a large conference table, several chairs, and a white dry-erase board. The second interview was conducted next to the career center counseling room in a small office which contained a computer desk. A third interview was not conducted as Matthew was not available.

Participant #2: Peter

Peter was a 51-year-old Hispanic male. He had been attending a public, secular, counselor education graduate program for approximately 1 year. He described himself as

a conservative Christian who attended a Catholic church. He stated that he was baptized a Catholic a few weeks after his birth and that he had believed and practiced his religion throughout his life; however, it had only been in the past two years that he had re-established his faith. He stated he did not acknowledge being “born again.” He described his religious experience and involvement as very important. He reported attending church one time each week, and praying and reading the Bible daily.

After going through the participant selection process, Peter and I met for the first time in front of a public library. The library was closed, so we moved to a small, low traffic, quiet coffee shop. We sat at a secluded booth in the back of the shop to conduct the interview. The second interview was conducted at a local public library in a study carrel. A final interview was conducted in a similar carrel at the same public library.

Participant #3: Rebecca

Rebecca was a 22-year-old Caucasian female. She had been attending a public, secular, counselor education graduate program for approximately 7 months. She described herself as a conservative Christian who identified with being Baptist, Methodist or non-denominational. She reported being a Christian for about 12 years, since the fifth grade. She described her religious experience and involvement as very important. She reported attending church one time each week, praying seven times per week, and reading the Bible five times per week. She earned her undergraduate degree from a Baptist university and attended a Christian high school.

After going through the participant selection process, Rebecca and I met for the first time at her university in her counselor education department area. The initial interview was conducted in a departmental counseling room which contained two chairs.

The second interview was conducted in the same room. The final interview was conducted at a local public library in a study carrel.

Participant #4: Leah

Leah was a 27-year-old Caucasian female. She had been attending a public, secular, counselor education graduate program for approximately 8 months. She described herself as a conservative Christian and identified with the Episcopalian denomination. Leah stated she had been a Christian since kindergarten or age four. That was the earliest time she could remember being in church and talking about “Jesus in my heart.” She described her religious experience and involvement as very important. She reported attending church one time each week, praying 25 times per week, and reading the Bible four times per week.

After going through the participant selection process, Leah and I met for the first time at her university in her counselor education department area. The initial interview was conducted in a departmental counseling room which contained two chairs. The second interview was conducted in the same room. The final interview was conducted via phone due to Leah’s limited availability. During the final interview, she reported that she was at her home. I called her from my work office.

Participant #5: Elizabeth

Elizabeth was a 50-year-old Caucasian female. She had been attending a public, secular, counselor education graduate program for approximately 4 years and nine months. She reported having a M.A. in counselor education. She described herself as a conservative Christian who identified with a Baptist denomination. Elizabeth did not respond to the e-mail solicitation asking her how long she had been a Christian. She

described her religious experience and involvement as very important. She reported attending church two times per week, praying two or more times per week, and reading the Bible four to five times per week.

After going through the participant selection process, Elizabeth and I met for the first time at her university in her counselor education department area. The initial interview was conducted in a departmental counseling room which contained two chairs. The second interview was in the same room. The final interview was not conducted, because Elizabeth stated she was not available.

Participant #6: Chloe

Chloe was a 28-year-old Caucasian female. She had been attending a public, secular, counseling psychology graduate doctoral program for approximately seven months. She described herself as a conservative Christian who identified with the Southern Baptist denomination. She stated she had been a Christian for 22 years. She described her religious experience and involvement as very important. She reported attending church three times per week, praying 12 times per week, and reading the Bible six times a week.

After going through the participant selection process, Chloe and I met for the first time in front of one of her university's libraries. The initial interview was conducted in a library study room that contained a table and four chairs. The second interview was conducted in the same library study room. The final interview was conducted at a seminary in a classroom. The classroom contained a podium and approximately 30 student desks. Chloe earned a Masters of Divinity in Counseling and Psychology from

the same seminary. During the course of the interviews, Chloe and I discovered that we attended a class together at the seminary, but had no previous verbal contact.

Participant #7: Sarah

Sarah was a 25-year-old Caucasian female. She had been attending a public, secular, counseling psychology graduate doctoral program for approximately one year and six months. She described herself as a conservative Christian who identified with the Baptist denomination. She stated she had been a Christian for 17 years. She described her religious experience and involvement as very important. She reported attending church three times per week, praying 14 times per week, and reading the Bible seven times per week. Sarah completed a Master of Arts in Marriage in Family Counseling from a Baptist seminary.

After going through the participant selection process, Sarah and I met for the first time in her work office at a hospital clinic near her university. The room contained two chairs and an office desk. Sarah and I attended a seminary class together. We had casual conversations on a few occasions in the past at the seminary. The second interview was conducted in the same space as the initial interview. A final interview was not conducted, because Sarah no longer responded to e-mail communication.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that phenomenologists extract participant experiences in data analysis through continual review of data and vigilance over the researcher's own presuppositions. In order to elicit the meaning of participants' responses, data were reduced into meaningful, analyzable units. Meaningful blocks of data were then linked and developed into coherent units that were described as themes.

Data displays were constructed, to assist in data analysis and draw accurate conclusions (Miles & Huberman). With-in case and cross-case data displays were used to present participants' data responses systematically and to explore and describe the phenomenon under investigation (Miles & Huberman).

First Round of Individual Interviews

The first round of interviews focused on the overall research question: What are the experiences of orthodox conservative Christian students attending a public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs? Initial interview questions utilized to explore this research question included: (a) How would you describe your experiences as a conservative orthodox Christian in a secular counseling graduate program? (b) How would you describe your experiences with peers and faculty? (c) In general, how would you describe your reactions, thoughts, feelings and behaviors in response to your experiences? (d) Why did you decide to go to a secular university as opposed to a Christian university? (e) As a Christian in a secular program, what would you like to see continue in your program, and what would you like to see different? (f) What is it like for you to express yourself during this interview? (g) How have you changed as a Christian, if at all, while attending a secular program? (h) How do you maintain your Christian identity/culture while attending a secular program? and (i) Is there anything else that you think is important that you would like to express as it relates to your experience as a Christian in a secular institution?

Because flexibility is a key ingredient for qualitative research, it is impossible to know how participants will respond to a phenomenon in which there is little known. Accordingly, I developed additional questions to provide clarification and further detail

as the participant responded (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Questions “a” through “c” were the initial questions intended for the initial interview and questions “d” through “i” emerged from participants’ responses.

Analysis of Initial Interviews

Data obtained from the initial interviews were transcribed from audiotape by a professional transcriptionist. Analysis began as each transcript was completed; I reviewed each transcript individually for accuracy to familiarize myself with participants’ initial responses. Next, coding procedures were initiated with a thorough review of each transcript. Upon a second review of each transcript and initial theme development, data were recoded, and within case analysis was conducted. The next step in data analysis involved cross-case analysis, at which time data were re-organized into three categories and ten themes.

The first category, *reflections on secular programs*, included the following underlying themes: (a) reasons for attending and (b) expected experiences. The second category, *experiences attending secular programs*, included the following themes: (a) positive experiences, (b) difficult experiences (c) faculty and peer interactions, (d) responses to experiences, and (e) desired experiences. The final category, *Christian identity*, included the following themes: (a) identity expression experiences, (b) Christian identity change and (c) Christian identity maintenance.

Categories and Themes

The following section provides an explanation of the three categories and ten themes that emerged during the first round of analysis. Participants’ responses are included to illustrate each theme.

Category I: Reflections on Secular programs

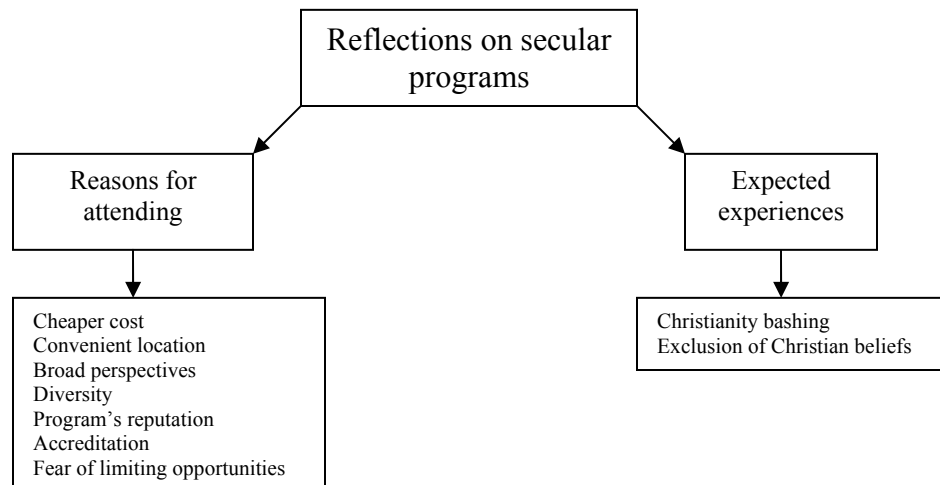
Two themes emerged as part of the first category. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the first category's themes and descriptors that emerged during the initial round of interviews. A detailed discussion of themes and descriptors follows.

Reasons for attending. Participants reported several reasons for attending a secular counseling and counseling psychology program. Participant responses indicated that (a) cheaper cost, (b) convenient location, and (c) a desire to experience broader perspectives and diversity were the primary reasons they decided to attend secular counseling and counseling psychology programs.

Matthew I was going to go to a Christian university to get my master's degree. However, Christian institutions are private and cost more. I also wanted a broader perspective and to experience diversity. As a Christian seeking growth, I would find a broader perspective and diversity by stepping outside of my comfort zone and choosing a secular university. Granted I am a Christian, that doesn't mean I have to go to a Christian university to fulfill my career goals.

Figure 1

First Round Summary of Category I: Reflections on Secular Programs



According to respondents, life circumstances also contributed to where they chose to pursue their academic training. For example, one participant indicated that she would have attended a Christian program if her circumstances were different.

Elizabeth The secular program was here in the city where my family is located. I talked to a couple who went to a program at the seminary, and it sounded like a great program. Had the seminary program been here, I would have jumped at the opportunity.

Participants also remarked that they attended secular institutions because of the specific program's reputation and accreditation. In fact, two participants expressed a fear of limiting career opportunities if they had attended a Christian institution.

Sarah The decision was a struggle, because I had never attended a secular school before. I wanted a respectable school with accreditation, but the only accredited religious program was too far away to move. I also wanted to be respected as a Christian psychologist. I know people who graduated with their doctorate in counseling from seminary, and it didn't hold much weight unless they were at a religious organization or church.

Expected experiences. Two participants commented on expected experiences while attending a secular counseling and counseling psychology program. Both respondents stated, "I was coming in expecting the worst."

Rebecca [I] heard horror stories about teachers who constantly bash Christianity or don't allow students to speak about it in class. I have friends who felt persecuted if they talked about Christianity, so I was scared and didn't expect to be able to talk about God and my religious beliefs. I decided to push my religious beliefs aside and not let them be part of my secular university experience.

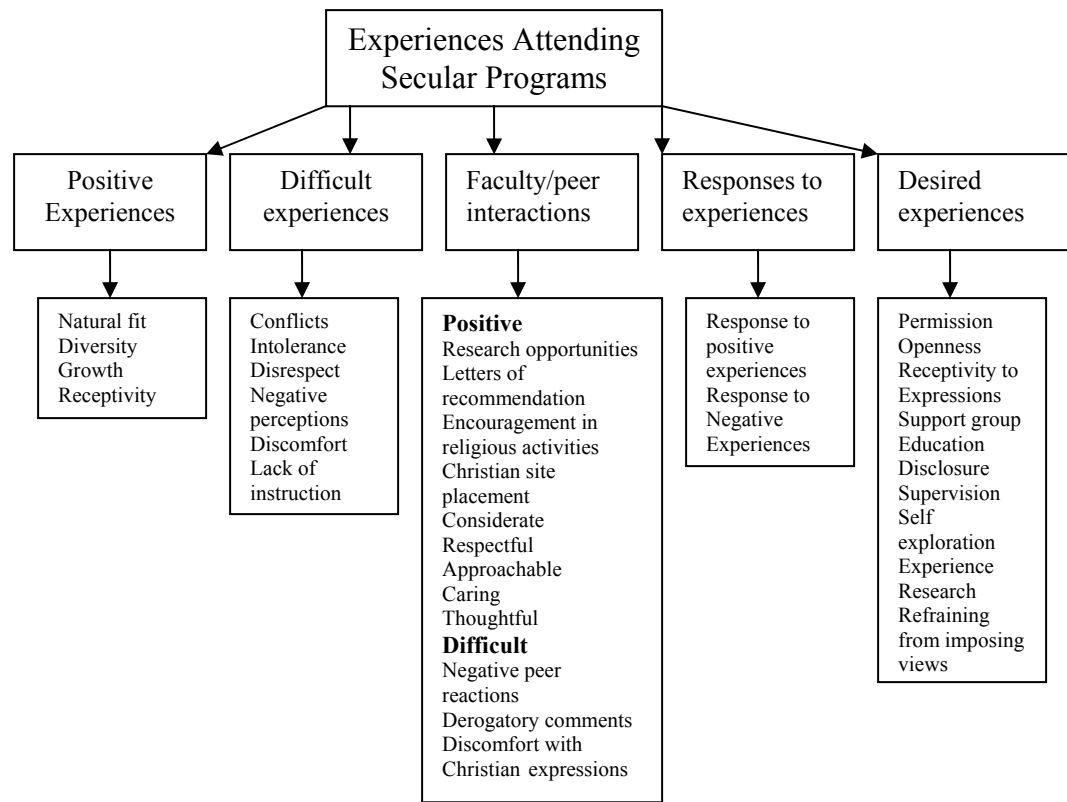
Category II: Experiences Attending Secular Programs

Participants reported a variety of general experiences that occurred during their secular program attendance. Experiences were categorized on a continuum that ranged from positive to difficult. Themes which described participants' experiences were: (a)

positive experiences, (b) difficult experiences, (c) faculty and peer interactions, (d) responses to experiences, and (e) desired experiences. Figure 2 is a visual representation of the second category's themes and descriptors that emerged during the initial round of interviews.

Figure 2

First Round Summary of Category II: Experiences Attending Secular Programs



Positive experiences. Six of the seven participants described an overall positive experience. Respondents explained their positive experiences through terms such as: (a) natural fit, (b) diversity and personal growth, and (c) receptivity to Christian perspectives.

Three of seven participants described a natural fit between Christian qualities and qualities valued in the counseling professions. Specific examples of Christian qualities

that were described as valued in counseling included: (a) a desire to help people, (b) concern for others, (c) empathy and (d) genuineness.

Matthew My perspective on helping people comes from a natural outflow of Christianity to help and be there for individuals who are hurting, hopeless and in crises.

Rebecca People drawn to be counselors have the qualities that Christians possess. I'm not saying that everybody who wants to be a counselor is going to be a Christian, but genuineness, empathy and having a heart for others goes along with what Jesus taught.

Two participants described learning and growth while interacting with a diverse population and obtaining a variety of viewpoints while attending a secular program.

Matthew I'm learning loads of information about myself, my faults, and my misconceptions of the world.

Rebecca Attending a secular program has been a real growing experience and very positive... This was very different than what I thought it was going to be.

Two other respondents remarked that they were able to express concepts from their Christian worldview and thought faculty and students were open to their expressions that their Christian perspectives might have provided a learning opportunity for others.

Sarah One of my most positive experiences was doing a presentation on forgiveness from a Christian perspective. I'm used to talking about forgiveness in a religious way. My professor and some of the other students were open to my perspective and we had a lengthy discussion. The presentation was enlightening for them as a different perspective.

Difficult experiences. While all participants reported overall positive experiences, four of the seven participants also described difficult experiences. One of the four participants described several difficult experiences. Two respondents initially denied any difficult experiences, but later stated that they had some difficulties with peers (see faculty and peer interactions theme). Difficult experiences were described through terms

such as: (a) values and ethics conflict, (b) intolerance and disrespect, (c) negative perceptions, (d) discomfort, (e) time conflicts, and (f) lack of instruction.

Matthew reported difficult experiences related to conflicts between what he believed and valued as a Christian and what he believed was being taught by some faculty and required by ethical standards.

Matthew I understand that I can't impose my values and beliefs on someone. However, I cannot counsel some clients who have values that are not the same as mine. I've heard students say, "I don't agree with some lifestyles" and they were told, "no, you need to be open to them." The experience was like being in a political environment where if a few republicans were in a room full of democrats, they don't dare say they are republicans, because the democrats will attack them.

Matthew also reported a difficult experience related to a perception of a "double standard" in regards to tolerance and respect for diversity. He perceived a requirement in counseling for openness and acceptance, except when that requirement pertained to Christian beliefs and values.

Matthew There is a double standard. Everything is to be accepted except for Christianity. I am required to be open and accepting, but I cannot bring in my Christian beliefs, because then I'm close minded. Although not directly stated, the lesson being taught is that to be an effective counselor I have to compromise my value system.

Two participants reported that they believed their Christian beliefs, perspectives, and values did not matter to others in their programs, were not respected, and did not receive attention in the classroom.

Elizabeth What bothered me in the ethics class was that ... some ideas definitely went against my beliefs. I tried to express my thoughts and feelings, but they were not received and were tossed aside. My views were not respected in that classroom and discussion. The experience was frustrating. I thought, "fine, I just won't talk about my thoughts and feelings in here."

Matthew I had to participate in a role play with a client who had a lifestyle that I didn't agree with. I wanted to say, "I can not speak with you, because of my own biases and prejudices." However, I had to continue with the exercise and act it out, but it put me in a position to say my values didn't matter. Anytime I mention anything that goes along with a Christian mindset, those values don't matter.

Matthew also remarked that he perceived some faculty or peers had negative perceptions or misperceptions of Christians or Christianity.

Matthew I know the bad taste a lot of people have in their mouths about Christianity. People think that Christians hate and judge people, and that is what Christianity is all about.

Matthew described several uncomfortable feelings as he struggled with difficult experiences. His uncomfortable feelings related to peer responses to Christian perspectives and his desire to express his viewpoints and clarify his beliefs and values.

Matthew The response I received was disdain for Christianity as if she knew I was giving a Christian response or a conservative view point on abortion. Everything that she hated about Christian responses or conservative views came out at once and it was real ugly. I was confused and didn't understand where her response was coming from. ... There was inner turmoil for wanting to get my point across and realizing that saying something may not have been the smartest decision.

Likewise, Matthew also reported struggling with other uncomfortable feelings. His feelings were based on a sense of being different from others and fear of hampering his professional growth.

Matthew I felt discomfort as if I was alone in a room full of people who think and feel differently than I do. I want to let [others] know that I accept and care about them, and I am there for them. But, at the same time, I have to do so putting aside my values and beliefs, because if I were to tell everybody that I am a Christian and don't agree with certain things, my disclosures would hamper my professional growth and future in counseling, because many people find acceptance with things that I don't find acceptance with.

One participant described time conflicts and a sense of unfairness between program expectations and her religious activities.

Sarah I've had issues with professors about time commitments. I am very involved in my church, but professors don't understand that. I don't always tell faculty I'm absent because of a youth retreat, because religious activities are looked at as optional and the time I spend in church could be spent towards academics. In contrast, if someone said they were going to a conference, then being absent wouldn't be a problem.

Finally, Elizabeth stated she did not receive any instruction on how to address religious and spiritual issues in counseling.

Elizabeth I had my own way of approaching religious and spiritual issues, but we were never taught how to approach them.

Faculty and peer interactions. Participants described a variety of experiences in relation to both faculty and peer interactions. Faculty and peer experiences were categorized on a continuum that ranged from positive to difficult. All seven respondents reported overall positive experiences related to faculty and most peers. On occasion, participants experienced difficulty.

Positive faculty and peer interactions. All seven participants reported an overall positive experience with faculty and most peers. Positive faculty experiences and specific examples of support included: (a) research opportunities, (b) letters of recommendation, (c) encouragement in religious activities, and (d) Christian site placement. Participants described faculty with terms such as: (a) considerate, (b) respectful, (c) approachable, (d) caring, and (e) thoughtful.

Matthew My experiences have all been 99 percent positive. I've begun to develop lasting friendships with some classmates. My relationships with faculty have been very positive and supportive. Professionally, faculty have given me opportunities to assist with

research, written letters of recommendation for me, and I can stop in and talk to them to see how their day is going.

Leah There was rarely any problems with other students. Faculty treated me with consideration, respect and were approachable if I have a problem. They want to make sure that I'm doing okay and not just getting an "A."

Peter I get along with everyone. There haven't been any confrontations or hostility between me and any others. Faculty are caring, thoughtful, and supportive.

Rebecca One of my teachers said that I need to remember to take care of myself and avoid burnout. My teachers always talk about church being a support system for some individuals, and to remember to make sure I go if that is a support system for me.

Elizabeth One of the professors arranged for a Christian site placement for my internship and that was special to me. I had a sense the faculty cared, because effort was put forth to arrange a site that matched my interests.

Rebecca and Elizabeth both reported that they valued interaction with other Christians in their program and valued likeness as Christians.

Rebecca I've become close friends with a few of the girls in my class. Everyone I hang out with is a Christian. The Christian students and faculty think the same things I do, so the experience is easier because there are people in the program who are like me.

Elizabeth Some of the students are strong professing Christians and it is fun to have them around to discuss cases from a Christian perspective. I know there are at least two other [Christians] in [class], so I'm not the lone voice in there.

Similarly, Chloe described positive peer experiences which centered on having other supportive Christian friends, and not feeling alone as a Christian. She described a sense of being "different" from others in her program and although she described her professors and classmates as being supportive academically, they were not as supportive in other areas.

Chloe At times, I have felt different from my classmates and the professors. Classmates and professors are supportive, but in a different way than two Christians would be supportive of each other. Christians tend to be more concerned about my personal day-to-day and what's going on with me spiritually. There is less support in a general sense at a secular university.

In addition, Chloe described positive experiences that related to the opportunity to share her Christian beliefs and experiences with others and she valued faculty and peer receptivity in a relational context.

Chloe I've had positive experiences with getting to know people. Eventually, faculty or peers will ask me a question or I'll have an opportunity to say, "when I was at the seminary we'd talk about this" and segue into a conversation that's more Christ centered and show them why I believe what I believe. Nobody has ever suggested that my beliefs were inappropriate, so I've never had a negative experience or believed I was persecuted for my beliefs.

Likewise, Sarah reported that the faculty had been receptive to her as a Christian and that she had not had any difficulties with faculty.

Sarah Professors have been very open. I was shocked faculty would have accepted me straight from seminary, and I wasn't sure if they knew what they were getting themselves into by accepting me or if there was going to be a good match. But, I haven't had a problem at all.

Difficult faculty and peer interactions. Four of the seven participants reported difficult experiences with faculty or peers. When difficult faculty or peer interactions occurred, they appeared to relate to interactions with other students. Difficult relational experiences included: (a) negative peer reactions, (b) derogatory comments, and (c) discomfort with Christian expressions.

Matthew reported having difficult relational experiences as peers reacted negatively in response to expressed Christian beliefs and values.

Matthew There was a civil argument about my belief system and another individual's belief system. We saw things differently. I openly

expressed my Christian values and beliefs, and spoke up for my faith and others joined in on his side as if they were speaking out and attacking me to a degree, because of my value system.

Matthew and Sarah provided additional examples of negative peer reactions during a discussion related to the topics of abortion and homosexuality.

Matthew I had a recent situation related to abortion counseling where I received a real sharp ugly answer from one of my peers. Once again, I believed my value system was being confronted. The peer's response was more like an automatic reaction and seemed to be an attack towards what she thought Christianity was or was supposed to be.

Sarah Students agreed that Christians who opposed homosexuality were wrong. If I spoke up and said, "I believe homosexuality is wrong," I would have been, I hate to use the word attacked, but singled out.

Two participants reported that they experienced derogatory comments from peers in their program related to Christian beliefs and values. As a result, the two participants experienced a negative emotional state.

Rebecca One student said, "You're closed minded and need to examine your world view. You think everyone who is not a Christian is going to hell," but I didn't say that. I was fearful he would jump all over me if I said something wrong. I felt discouraged, because I couldn't articulate to him what I was trying to say without him judging me and critiquing every word I said waiting to say, "no, you're wrong." He looked at me skeptically with a smirk on his face as if he was right and I was wrong.

Sarah also reported having some negative experiences with a peer in her program where the peer would make derogatory comments about Christians or Christian perspectives.

Sarah I've had negative experiences with one of the students in my program who would make back handed comments about "those Baptists" or different Christian beliefs, especially about homosexuality. She would slam Baptists, but because she knew I went to a Baptist church, she would turn around and say, "oh, but I don't mean anything bad about you."... Later, she would completely deny that her comments were derogatory, but they were a slam to me because I have Christian beliefs ... It was very

irritating and I felt bad about myself, because I didn't say anything. I should have stuck up for my beliefs.

Sarah gave an additional example of other students in another class who made derogatory comments about Christians and Christian beliefs and described her feelings.

Sarah I feared some of the students in the clinical psychology program and was hesitant to say anything, because they were very over bearing and harsh. One time, we were in ethics class discussing the issue of homosexuality and some students said, "I don't understand how all the people in the Bible belt are so religious and believe that homosexuality is wrong. People in the South are backwoods."

Although Leah initially denied any difficulty with peers, she later described difficulties with Christian peers in the way some of the peers expressed their Christian perspectives. Initially, she thought that some Christian peers were disclosing their beliefs in an inappropriate context or manner, but after clarification thought the disclosures could be insightful.

Leah I perceived religious opinions as not being on topic. It bothered me, but had to think the input was their opinion and how they were formulating working with a client and processing their feelings about working with a client. Since then, students have said, "this is my faith and opinion, but I wouldn't push them on anyone" and I have been fine with that. If faith and religious opinions are part of the student's application, they are worth talking about, are insightful, and can be used for learning.

Leah provided a specific example of when Christian students expressed their Christian beliefs and she was uncomfortable with their expressions.

Leah In talking about early adulthood and that some people may decide to marry, live together, or be single, some students started to talk about their religious beliefs. Students said, "living together before marriage is unacceptable and I would have to tell a client that I don't believe it's OK," and it bothered me.

Response to experiences. Participants described a variety of responses to experiences as Christians attending secular programs. Participants varied in responses to both positive experiences, as well as to difficult experiences.

Responses to positive experiences. Four of seven participants described a variety of reactions related to positive experiences in their program. Participants described responses to positive experiences in terms of being more open minded, less judgmental, encouraged, motivated, and more invested in the program.

Peter reported being reinforced for attending his program as a response to positive experiences, and Leah went as far as to say she would “try to recruit students to apply to the program.” Rebecca stated positive experiences encouraged her faith, and gave her “a sense of ease, comfort, and anticipation for future opportunities as a Christian in a secular environment.”

Peter I tend to be more opened minded... and I'm a little more receptive to others in the church. Maybe, I have been drawing conclusions about others too readily.

Leah I felt positive in giving more to the program, studying, investing and being here all the time, because I feel supported. Because professors invest time in the students and the way they teach us, I've responded positively back.

Responses to difficult experiences. Participants described a variety of difficult experiences and response to those experiences. Range of responses to difficult experiences included: (a) regretting not sharing perspectives, (d) acting defensively or feeling singled out, (c) fearing repercussions, (d) experiencing difficult emotions, (e) becoming withdrawn, (f) struggling with identity, (g) reaffirming being open minded, (h) reaffirming values, (i) becoming more autonomous, and (j) seeking opportunities to share their faith.

Two participants described feeling regret that they had not been more vocal in their Christian perspectives and expressions. Elizabeth stated she thought being more vocal would have added an additional perspective to discussions. Sarah reported regret, because she thought she was compromising her beliefs.

Elizabeth I wish I had voiced my opinions and thoughts more. I should have spoken up and not cared if anybody agreed with me or not because it would have added another dimension to the topic.

Sarah I regretted not speaking out, because Christian beliefs are something that I do believe. I was compromising in what I believe, because I didn't share my perspective and my opinions.

One participant responded to difficult experiences by reacting defensively, because she thought she was singled out because of her Christian beliefs and misunderstood by others.

Sarah Christianity is not something that all students experience or value. There have been times when I reacted defensively and assumed I was singled out. In the same sense, I've never started arguing or fighting with someone because of disagreements. I try to state and explain what I believe, because it could be that others had a bad taste of Christianity or didn't know what I believe. When I have kept silent, I've regretted it later.

In response to difficult experiences, Matthew reported a fear of repercussions.

Matthew Right now, I have an open door and great relationships with a few of my professors. If I begin to take a stand for what I believe is right, I am afraid those doors may begin to close... if I say anything negative, I don't know how that would affect my grade... I would be afraid of repercussions or attitudes that people may have towards my expressions.

Matthew also described experiencing difficult emotions in response to several different experiences.

Matthew Emotionally, there is a lot of confusion and turmoil when it comes to knowing what I want to do and not being able to do it in fear of repercussion, offending someone or someone saying something negatively. I can't even think of the words, but there is a lot of inner struggle between being vocal and not being vocal.

Leah reported anger in response to Christian peers for the manner the peers were expressing their Christian perspectives.

Leah I got really mad with people who were expressing Christian perspectives. I couldn't understand why the students were polluting the Christian name, and I wanted to stop it, but I didn't want to react and say they were being one-sided and absolute.

Two participants reported becoming withdrawn in their Christian expressions as a result of difficult experiences. For example, Matthew reported withdrawing due to conflict he perceived so as to not be offensive to others, and Elizabeth reported withdrawal because she believed her expressions were not appreciated.

Matthew I've withdrawn and don't feel that I am as vocal as I need to be about my faith, so as not to be offensive to others and because of the negative experiences and the general sense I get that permeates from the ethical code and the professors on staff of "yea, you're a Christian and that's good, but don't bring that in here."

In response to some difficult experiences, Matthew also described struggling with his Christian identity and becoming a professional counselor. He was unsure if he would be able to have a future in the counseling profession as a Christian.

Matthew I am not even able to let others know who and what I am. I have this feeling of letting myself and others down, and I'm torn between wanting to share my faith and not being able to in fear of offending someone. Is sharing my faith going to affect me in the future? I actually began to entertain the idea that Christianity was no longer for me, because I thought, "how can I be a counselor and a Christian when I have to think this way?"

In response to being confronted about Christian perspectives, Matthew reaffirmed that he was open-minded. Then, he clarified his perspectives and thought others could benefit from his point of view.

Matthew Students are taught to be open and accepting, and I am. However, there are things that I can't agree with because they are beyond what is in the Bible and what I rule my life by. Maybe others need

to be exposed to a different view. I could enrich peoples' experience from my own, but whether or not I am able to do that is another question, because I honestly believe there is no room to express my religion within the counseling environment.

Two participants described compromising their Christian values as they attempted to manage the difficult experiences they were having while in their programs. However, they eventually reaffirmed their Christian values.

Matthew Some people may not even know that I am a Christian, what I believe, what I have faith in or what I really do on a daily basis, because I didn't want to be looked upon as a religious zealot. In order to find acceptance, I entertained a lot of activities I would have never done prior that other students did, that I don't consider to be Christian, like getting drunk. I am bothered that I've gotten drunk and made wrong decisions, and didn't even realize that I was allowing my value system and internal beliefs to be compromised.

Similarly, Rebecca reported dating the peer in her program with whom she had difficulties. In the process, she stated she compromised her values.

Rebecca I was so involved last semester. I was in a Bible study and in the Word every day. I was so sensitive to the Spirit, would cry tears of joy, was in tune with God, and loved it. It makes me sad that I'm not in tune with God now, because I started dating the guy that stated I was "judgmental" and disagreed with my worldview. I didn't realize that I was being complacent and brought down.

As Matthew began to realize that he was compromising his Christian beliefs and values, he eventually reaffirmed them and his Christian identity.

Matthew I've come to the realization that I've been engaging in activities so other people will like me. Why wouldn't faculty and peers like me for who I am? I've had to begin to make decisions and choices based upon my own value system.

In response to some difficulties, one participant stated she became more autonomous, grew in faith and used difficult experiences as an opportunity for growth.

Rebecca Being here didn't hinder or hurt [my Christian identity] in any way, and I maintained it. If anything, [being here] has made [my

identity] stronger in that I sought [my faith] out for myself, went to church and got involved, because there was nobody here forcing me to go. When I had that negative experience of being accused of being closed-minded, I dove into the Word to learn more about why I reacted with emotion and wanted to do something about [the negative experience] and to turn it into a positive experience so I could grow and learn more about myself through that experience.

Similarly, another participant described responding to difficulties as an opportunity to share her faith with others and challenge herself.

Chloe It is frustrating not to be supported by brothers and sisters in Christ who are walking through the experiences together. I miss that. The secular experience has been challenging for me and my thoughts and actions have shifted to stepping outside of my comfort zone, responding to people in a different way, and seizing opportunities to share and show faculty and students Christ's love through my actions and words.

Desired experiences. Respondents had a variety of experiences as Christian students attending a public, secular, counseling and counseling psychology graduate program. In response, participants stated they wanted to implement the following changes or have the following experiences in their program: (a) permission and openness, (b) receptivity to expressions, (c) a Christian support group, (d) education, (e) disclosure, (f) supervision, (g) self exploration, (h) faculty education, experience, and research interest, and (i) refraining from imposing views.

Two participants reported that they would like an open environment and support to be able to discuss the topics of religion and spirituality, as well to engage in discussions from a Christian perspective.

Matthew The conflict needs to be put out in the air. Can we maintain our Christian value system, continue in our faith and still be effective counselors? Having an open environment where we can speak our minds and allowing it to be okay to mention God, faith, values and Christianity would be good.

Similarly, Elizabeth reported that she wanted permission to discuss religious and spiritual topics and suggested faculty disclosing their viewpoints related to religion and spirituality might facilitate discussion.

Elizabeth Open up the discussion and give permission to be able to talk about spirituality which is a real part of every person. The fact that the instructors never mention the spiritual aspect of being human almost makes it a subject that shouldn't be brought up. Faculty disclosing a little bit about themselves would at least put the subject out in the air and wouldn't make the subject taboo.

One participant who experienced receptivity to Christian perspectives and expressions stated she would like for receptivity to continue.

Sarah My professors have been open and willing to hear different perspectives, so that should continue. I'm able to say "I'm doing this because..." and explain my perspective. Even though supervisors may not agree with my perspectives, they support it.

Matthew stated he desired support groups in his program, university and nationwide, to address stress and struggles as Christians attending secular programs.

Matthew Being devout can create a lot of inner turmoil for individuals who are struggling with their faith whether they are Christians, Muslims or Jews. We all hold certain elements and certain values to be true. So, there has to be a conflict when counseling individuals who come from a value system that is a far extreme outside of your values. Having a support group, where folks can talk and share stress, feelings, and the conflict that sometimes exist between the ethical guidelines and our faith would be good.

Two participants stated that they wanted to be educated in regards to religious and spiritual topics and to feel comfortable addressing religious and spiritual topics when they presented in counseling.

Leah If I had a client who wanted to talk about some difficulty such as "I want to raise the children in a particular faith, but my husband wants to raise them in another faith," I want to know I've been educated and to feel comfortable in what to do with that client. It's not just my personal opinion from my own religious experience.

Chloe stated was prepared to address issues related to religion and spirituality, because she graduated from a seminary where psychology, religion, and spirituality were integrated. Chloe speculated that students were afraid to address issues related to religion and spirituality, because they were not prepared to do so.

Chloe A lot of my classmates have had clients who come in and want to talk about God and spirituality, but that scares counselors, because they don't know how to engage clients in a discussion about that... People have narrow views about what Christians really believe. Regardless of whether or not other students believe in Christianity, they should be prepared to interact with clients and not automatically assume that clients' religion is part of their problem.

Leah and Elizabeth suggested that education could be implemented through courses related to religion and spirituality. Elizabeth clarified that the course should be taught by someone who has experience or expertise in religion or spiritual issues.

Leah I would love if there was a course offered on the new trend of incorporating spirituality and faith into counseling. I am told there is this neat thing that's accepted and exciting, but I have not been taught how to incorporate spirituality and faith into counseling.

Elizabeth I would like to see a special topics course in religion and spirituality for those who want to take it ... taught by somebody who has some experience and expertise in this area.

Elizabeth also suggested guest speakers or special topics in religion could be used to facilitate education and suggested presenting on a variety of faiths could help educate counselors to various worldviews of people of faith.

Elizabeth I would like guests from different faiths to speak, so that when we run into clients of that faith we will have background and knowledge about their faith and mindset.

In addition, Elizabeth reported that she would like faculty to disclose their faith perspective so that she would know the perspective the faculty held in relation to religion and spirituality.

Elizabeth I would like for the instructors to share a little bit about themselves personally, including their faith, so we will at least know where they stand, but it doesn't mean they wouldn't respect others.

Another participant suggested that supervision could be used to focus on educating students in regards to the topics of religion and spirituality and suggested that in order to be competent from a multicultural perspective, issues related to religion and spirituality were important to address.

Chloe Implementing spirituality into supervision would be helpful. Professors should be prepared to supervise and encourage students to explore their own and clients' spirituality rather than dismiss it. When counselors encounter something that they don't know much about or don't feel comfortable with, they try to change the conversation when a conversation about spirituality might be the very thing a client needs. If counselors are trying to be more multi-cultural and understand different cultures and backgrounds, but don't try to understand the spirituality piece, they might be missing what's really important for clients and what clients need to talk about.

Two participants also stated they desired program faculty to have greater interest in research related to religion and spirituality. Elizabeth suggested more research may provide faculty with a degree of comfort in addressing religion and spirituality.

Elizabeth There is a lack of research on spirituality and religion. Maybe there is a lack of professors with the expertise to teach spirituality and religion.

Similarly, Sarah stated she would like professors to have greater research interest and be better educated in regards to religion and spirituality.

Sarah I would like to see the professors have more research and educational interests or background in religious issues, because this is the Bible belt. Many students and clients are very religious and it is something that is not addressed. If clients are very religious, not addressing religion may get them defensive.

A final desire implied was that faculty continue to refrain from imposing their views on others. For example, Rebecca stated, “faculty do a very good job of not imposing their views on us.”

Category III: Christian Identity

Participants described several themes as it related to their identity. The three themes that emerged included: (a) identity expression, (b) identity change, and (c) identity maintenance. Figure 3 is a visual representation of the third category, themes and descriptors that emerged during the initial round of interviews.

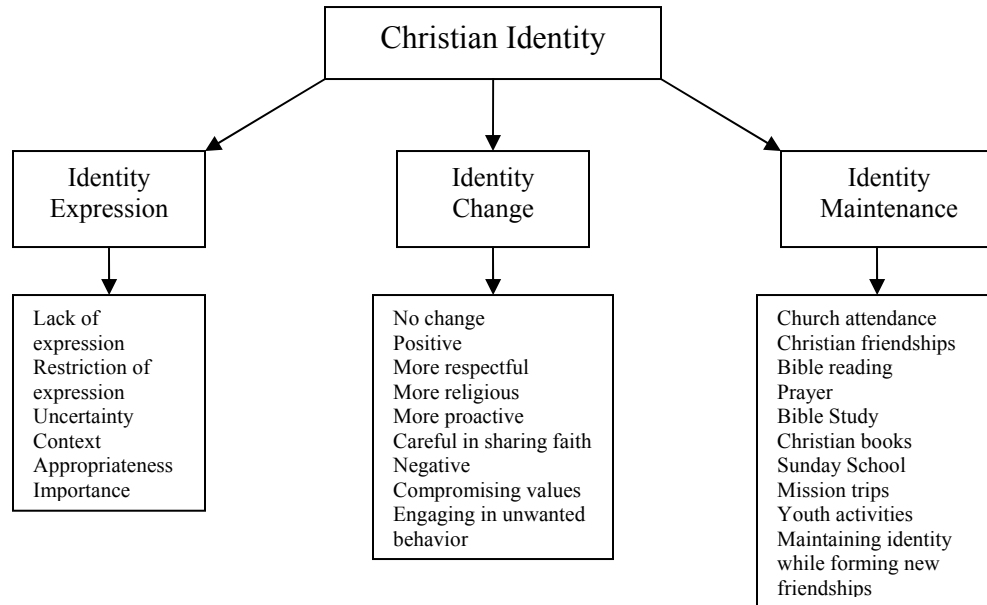
Identity expression. There were a variety of responses that described Christian identity expressions. Descriptions of identity expression experiences were described through factors such as: (a) lack of expression, (b) uncertainty, (c) context and appropriateness, (d) importance, and (e) clarification of perspectives. During the research interview, the majority of participants described a sense of freedom in being able to express themselves as Christians in ways they had not experienced while attending their programs.

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| <i>Matthew</i> | I haven’t been able to discuss the struggles that I see, and it was good to get them out and at least talk about it. There is a freedom involved with being able to talk. |
| <i>Chloe</i> | It has been a relief to be able to freely talk to someone in a place that’s comfortable and not threatening. |

Three of the seven participants reported they had not disclosed their Christian identity or perspectives in class or that discussion of religion and spirituality rarely occurred.

Figure 3

First Round Summary of Category III: Christian Identity



Peter I can't think of anything that I have overtly done or said that would be a blatant expression of my religion.

Rebecca attributed a lack of discussion in part to the class format and content of the classes she had taken.

Rebecca We don't really talk about religion or spirituality in class, because there is no reason to bring them up. We don't have discussion formatted classes. The format is teaching and our response to that. I'm just now having ethics, and I haven't had multicultural where we talk about spirituality and religion.

Chloe clarified that at times she chose to refrain from expressing herself depending on the topic being discussed and how strongly she related to the topic.

Chloe If the topic is something I feel strongly about, I'm going to speak up no matter what. Coming from an institution that integrated psychology and theology, I was expected to automatically do integration in class. Here, integration is not an active part of every class, so I don't always bring it up.

One respondent described a sense of restriction in regards to her ability to express herself.

Elizabeth Thinking about religion, spirituality and the counselor education program, I felt restricted. The few times religion and spirituality were addressed occurred in the ethical sense of accepting what clients have to say and respecting their views. The impression was that there was no freedom to talk about religion or spirituality.

Another participant reflected Elizabeth's beliefs about restricted expression and reported feeling frustrated, anxious, and disappointed for not expressing his Christian perspectives.

Matthew I felt real anxious. "Do I say what I know faculty want me to say, or do I speak my own viewpoint?" I let myself down for not speaking my own viewpoint and being honest and forthright. For example, if a gay person came into my office I wouldn't say "ewe, you're gay and you are going to hell." I would say, "I love you and care about you as a person, but I don't agree with your lifestyle or the choices that you are making," but that is not what I said or did.

Three participants described as sense of uncertainty as it related to expressing themselves as Christians in a classroom setting. For example, Rebecca seemed hesitant about discussing religion and spirituality and was not sure how her perspectives would be received.

Rebecca I don't know how talking about religion and spirituality is going to work. I talk about religion and spirituality outside of class or in papers, so others won't hear. My biggest fear is religious debates and discussions.

Elizabeth believed her expressions would be heard if she asserted herself, but at the same time she was unsure of how others might react to her expressions.

Elizabeth If I pushed to express my thoughts and feelings, the instructor would have heard me. He wouldn't have commented and would just return back to ethics. There would have been mixed reactions. There were quite a few different faiths in the room. The majority would have been fine with my thoughts and feelings and wouldn't have said anything about them. There are a couple of outspoken people who may have raised objections respectfully.

Sarah also described uncertainty as to how her Christian expressions would be perceived. However, she stated that her expressions were received well at times.

Sarah I wasn't sure how some of the professors would handle my perspectives, especially this one because he stated he had a negative experience with churches in the past and was no longer part of a church. However, he was open to my expressions. I presented material, and made one comment about how I'm used to the topic from a Biblical perspective, and he took off from there. The experience was very positive. I was shocked, surprised, and I laughed. Presenting the material was a great way to share my background and strength with faculty and peers.

In contrast to classroom settings, Rebecca stated she talked about religion and spirituality with other peers once she determined they held the same Christian beliefs.

Rebecca We talk about religion and spirituality, because we've become close friends and know where each other stands. At first, I was hesitant to talk about church, because of my fear of secular colleges. Once I did, we realized, "oh, so you are a Christian, okay." Then, we were free to talk about religion and spirituality.

Five of the seven participants implied that context was important when deciding to express Christian perspectives. Elizabeth thought sharing personal opinions was appropriate. However, Elizabeth clarified that there was a balance between discussing personal opinions in an academic context and the length of the discussions.

Elizabeth Although there's a limit, being able to voice my opinion as part of who I am should be received with respect and not put down at all. There's a balance. I shouldn't go on and on, because that would not be respecting other people. One or two sentences could express who I am as a person and if others were interested in more, they could ask.

Peter seemed to contradict himself in regards to the appropriate context and manner of religious expression at a secular institution.

Peter The university is not the right format to express my faith. I wouldn't hesitate to discuss my faith, but it hasn't come up yet. I'm sure my faith will come up at some point. My faith is going to be

easy to talk about, however I'm not a zealot. I'm not going to preach to people, because it's not appropriate in a counseling session. However, it is appropriate to talk about and teach spirituality to people who need that part of recovery.

Leah clarified that although she did not think interjecting her faith while counseling a client would be appropriate, she did think discussing her faith was appropriate if the topic arose.

Leah Making my faith what I'm teaching or counseling is not right. However, if faith comes up, I'll talk about it. I don't shy away from faith or pretend I'm not a Christian, but I don't say, "hey guys, I'm a Christian. Let's talk about Christians."

Chloe clarified the importance of expressing herself as a Christian and the feelings she had when she was able and not able to express herself and integrate her beliefs within the academic context.

Chloe When I've been able to express and integrate psychology, religion and spirituality in class and expose peers and faculty to the way that I've integrated them at seminary, I have felt good and happy. It was a chance to show people that Christ is an important part of my life. In Him being an important part of my life, He's going to naturally be an important part of my counseling. Even if I don't bring religion and spirituality up in session, I'm always thinking about that integration... I feel frustrated sometimes that religion and spirituality are not naturally integrated here and professors are not encouraging students to learn about integration in counseling.

Clarification of expressions. Several participants made statements that clarified their Christian perspectives and expressions. Overall, participants stated that they did not have a desire to impose Christian beliefs or values on others and they desired to work with clients from a variety of backgrounds.

Matthew I want to be a counselor who is Christian. Yes, I'm a Christian. I believe in God. I believe in Christ. I believe he died for my sins and I have a relationship with Him, but I don't want Christians to be the only people who walk through my doors. I want people

who walk through my doors to come from different value systems and different walks of life with different situations in life.

Rebecca I have to be able to relate to everybody, because people are going to be mandated or still want to see me. Not everyone thinks the same way a Christian thinks and people don't want ideals imposed on them.

Participants asserted that they respected other people's beliefs and values when those beliefs and values conflicted with their own. When beliefs and values were in conflict in a counseling session, two participants described separating their Christian identity from their counselor role to resolve the conflict.

Leah Christianity is my personal life and although my personal characteristics and religious beliefs will reflect my decisions in my personal life, counseling is not about forcing personal characteristics into professional ethics or sharing with clients. I am there to help clients work through their presenting problems and not sway them to my religious beliefs.

Rebecca I have my beliefs, but they don't get in the way of me being able to interact with secular people. I'm respectful of others' opinions and don't point my finger. However, it is going to be difficult if somebody comes to me and is totally lost spiritually. It may hurt me, because I know that there is a way clients can be at peace, but I'll have to switch my Christianity off and realize how to separate myself. I will be able to set aside my values, beliefs, and opinions during session to help clients.

In contrast, two other participants described a desire to work from within their Christian identity and the ability to express themselves while resolving any conflicts.

Matthew I am open to dealing with clients in regards to homosexuality, co-habitation, pre-marital sex, etc... I want to love and accept clients, but at the same let them know what my value systems are and who I am as a person. Clients will know that my value systems are here and available, but I don't want them to think that I am forcing them into any type of decision to follow Christ. I want clients to know that because of Christ, I care about, love, and am accepting of them. I don't agree with some clients, but I am here to listen and help them work through their problems, and I just so happen to be a Christian.

Elizabeth I can respect people as individuals and even respect their right to make decisions, but I don't have to say decisions are fine for them when I don't believe that.

Sarah stated that she respected peers' and clients' beliefs regardless of their positions, was sensitive to them and would make appropriate decisions when beliefs were in conflict.

Sarah I'm pretty open. I always respect people's beliefs. We may agree to disagree, but at least we can both state our side. With clients, beliefs are not an issue, because I'm there for them. If there was something in my past or a bias that would hurt therapy, I would talk it over with them and say, "I cannot be objective in this area. I'm afraid this would interfere with therapy, so let's try to find a better therapist for you" and present the choice to them. I'm not just going around and saying, "you're wrong."

One respondent stated she thought faculty and students had misperceptions related to Christians or Christian beliefs in counseling and academic contexts and desired to help others understand her Christian beliefs.

Chloe The professor and some of the students implied that believing the Bible is true causes people problems and that if they could get clients to not hold on to the Bible so strongly, then the clients would be healthier. I said believing that the Bible is true isn't the problem. The problem could be that people are misinterpreting the Bible. I tried to help the professor and students see that clients could hold on strongly to the belief that the Bible is completely true and still become healthier by using the Bible to help the clients understand their situation better. I even said I believe the Bible is true, and no one said anything negative.

Chloe offered explanations as to why others may misunderstand Christians or Christian beliefs to include: lack of experience in reading the Bible, misunderstanding the content of the Bible, misunderstanding Christian concepts, focusing on extreme experiences or people, and focusing on negative past experiences.

Chloe There are many factors which contribute to people thinking that Christians are narrow-minded and rigid. Some people don't understand the Bible and don't have experience reading it. Other people hear one or two concepts Christians believe, like sin, and blow it out of proportion, and conclude we're closed-minded and put labels on us. People don't understand the full concepts. Some peoples' perceptions are based on fanatical Christians they've seen on T.V. who have acted in a rigid or judgmental way, but for the most part, Christians aren't like that. Other times, they may have had bad experiences as a child in church, and they take the bad experiences with them.

Identity change. Participants reported a variety of responses in regards to changes in their Christian identity. Attending a secular program and its impact was described as having: (a) no influence, (b) leading to positive change, or (c) leading to negative change.

Some participants stated that their program had not had any influence on their Christian identity.

Elizabeth There have been changes for the good, because I have matured as a Christian, but the changes had nothing to do with the program at all. My program hasn't affected my Christianity. There is nothing that's subtracted from and nothing that has added to my sense of Christian identity.

Another participant stated she changed in a positive manner by becoming more proactive in her faith and grew spiritually. She reported changing in a negative manner in compromising her Christian values.

Rebecca My experiences in the program made me grow. I've changed in that I had to seek out church on my own and be more proactive in my spirituality. I care about Christianity, because it's part of me. My faith didn't die when I left a Christian university and that's made me happy. I've changed in ways that I've disliked in how easy it was to start dating someone who wasn't as strong in his spirituality as I was and how easy I fell when I got out of my faith.

Similarly, Sarah stated she had become more religious and her faith had been strengthened.

Sarah My experiences in the program have strengthened my faith. I have become more religious and involved in my church here, because I'm not around Christians all of the time or people who have the same goals as me. This is a difficult program and there are times when I get very stressed out and very frustrated. My faith is something that I can really depend on and it helps me get through.

Leah reported that she had become more respectful of others and had changed churches because she did not think her church was respecting others.

Leah Since I've started the program, I've changed churches. This program helped me realize I want to be a Christian, but I have to be respectful of others. At the church I was attending staff and parishioners were not respectful. My church needs to be a place where members are respecting other people. My family and I made a decision that "disrespecting others is not what we value," and we can't advocate that anymore.

As a result of her experiences in the program, Leah also became more careful in how she shared her faith with others, so as not to offend them. She stated, "my experiences made me see how Christian evangelism can be taken negatively."

Leah I believe in evangelism, sharing beliefs with others. When I had an instance when Christian students were sharing their beliefs in an uncaring manner and being forceful, it made me think, "I hope I've never done that." I'm not saying don't tell others about my faith, but be more careful in the way I am doing it, because I would not want to offend people or make them say, "if that's how Christians act, I don't want to have anything to do with Christianity."

Identity maintenance. Participants described a variety of activities which helped them maintain their identity as Christians. Five of the seven participants reported they maintained their sense of Christian identity primarily through: (a) church attendance, (b) Christian friendships, (c) reading the Bible, and (d) prayer.

Matthew My rooted-ness comes from maintaining a foundation of spirituality through Bible reading, prayer, and going and being active in my church... There have been brief times in the program and classroom environments where I have been able to identify

with some of the Christians there, talk with them, and share experiences and struggles with them.

Additional activities which helped participants maintain their sense of Christian identity included: (a) attending Bible study, (b) reading Christian books, (c) identifying with and sharing program struggles with Christian friends, (d) attending Sunday school, (e) participating in mission trips, (f) leading youth activities, (g) attending retreats, (h) incorporating faith into family life, and (i) maintaining identity while forming new friendships with people who were not Christians.

Leah I'm really involved with our church. We go to Sunday school. I have friends who are in different churches. We get together once a month to hang out and talk. I pray with my daughter and husband... I go on mission trips and lead retreats.

Chloe I work as a youth minister part time at a church. I still have interaction with the Christian community. Maintaining my faith is built into my week. On campus, I've developed strong relationships with people who are Christians. One part that really helps me maintain my Christian identity is to build relationships with other peers and at the same time continue to stick with what I believe and behave in the way that I have previously.

First Round Interview Summary

During the first round of interviews, three categories and ten themes emerged which described and explored the experiences of conservative orthodox Christians attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs. The first category, *reflections on secular programs*, included the underlying themes of reasons for attending and expected experiences. The second category, *experiences attending secular programs*, included themes of positive experiences, difficult experiences, faculty and peer interactions, responses to experiences, and desired experiences. The final category, *Christian identity*, included the underlying themes of identity expression, identity change and identity maintenance.

Figure 4 is a visual representation of the categories and themes that emerged during the initial round of interviews. The categories and themes discovered in the initial round of interviews were utilized to develop questions for the second round of interviews which are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

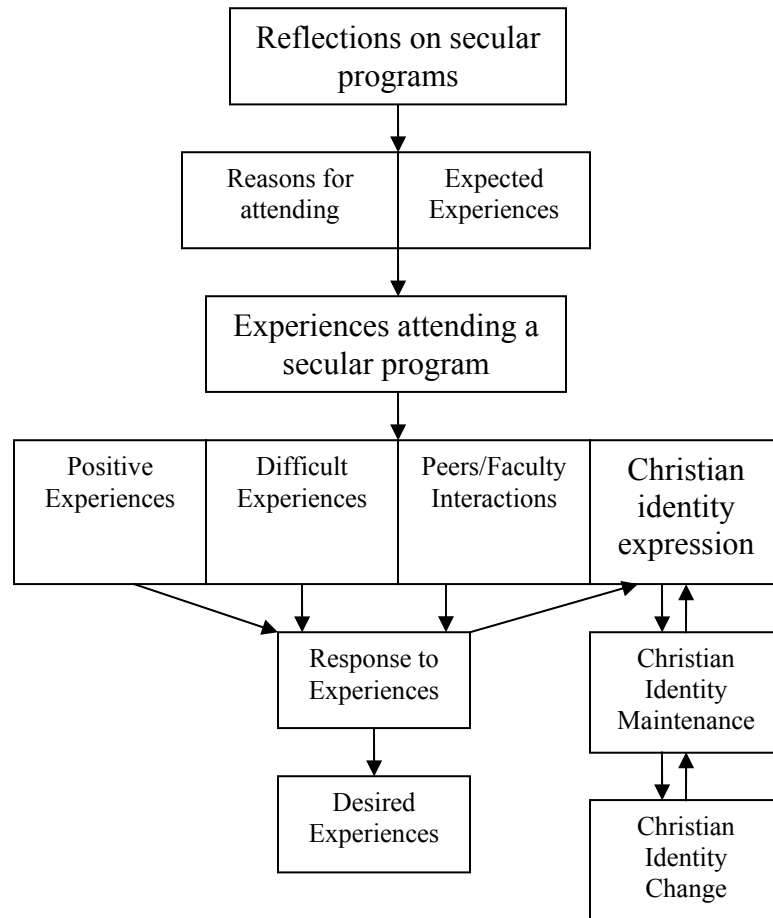
Second Round of Individual Interviews

The questions used in the second round of interviews were developed at the completion of the first round interview analysis. The second round of interviews were focused on first round interview follow-up and greater depth of responses.

Second round interview questions were: (a) You've had one month to reflect on the first interview. Is there anything you'd like to add? (b) How would you describe your expectations as a Christian coming into a secular program? (c) Assuming you maintain a theistic worldview, beliefs and values, how do you reconcile and incorporate learning from your secular program? (d) Some participants reported others had negative perceptions or misperceptions of Christians or Christianity. Do you think this occurs? If so why? (e) How do you think negative perceptions or misperceptions of Christians or Christianity affect their education and counseling experience? (f) What do you think accounts for participants who stated they haven't had any negative experiences and reported only positive experiences? (g) How have you maintained your Christian identity while attending a secular program? (h) How have you coped with any difficult experiences? (i) What is the appropriate/inappropriate context and manner to discuss Christian beliefs/values in your program? (j) How do you respond to participants who reported they were labeled closed minded when they disclosed their beliefs/values, and

Figure 4

Summary of First Round Interviews



why do you think this occurred? (k) How has or has your Christian identity changed while in a secular program? (l) What's it been like to talk to me here? and (m) Is there anything else you would like add or believe is relevant to the information you have provided? After the second round interview questions were asked, first round interview responses and analysis were shared with participants to ensure accuracy and provide participants an opportunity to add, clarify, or retract any responses to initial disclosures.

Analysis of Second Round Interviews

Data obtained from the second round of interviews were transcribed from audiotape by a professional transcriptionist. Analysis began as each transcript was

completed. Each transcript was reviewed for accuracy and read for familiarity. Next, initial coding was performed, then recoded and within case analysis was conducted. Within case analysis was then reviewed and detailed. Following, cross-case analysis was conducted, reviewed and detailed. Finally, data were re-organized into the existing framework of developed categories and themes.

Participant data during the second round of interviews confirmed the first category, *reflections on secular programs*, and all its themes. Additional experiences and descriptions were illuminated in the first category's existing themes, as well as a new theme, *reconciling worldviews*.

Participant data during the second round of interviews also confirmed the second category, *experiences attending secular programs*, and all its themes. Additional experiences and descriptions were explained in the second category's existing themes, as well as new themes and descriptors to include: (a) causes of negative perceptions, (b) impact of negative perceptions, (c) coping with difficult experiences, and (d) response to labels.

In addition, data during the second round of interviews confirmed the final category, *Christian identity*, and all of its existing themes. Additional experiences and descriptions were explored in the existing themes, as well as a new sub-theme, *appropriate context and manner for expression*. Finally, analysis and summarizations were reviewed by my dissertation chair and peer reviewer.

Categories and Themes

The following section provides an explanation of the additional information regarding the various themes and descriptors that emerged during the second round of analysis. Participants' responses are included to illustrate each theme and descriptor.

Category I: Reflections on Secular Programs

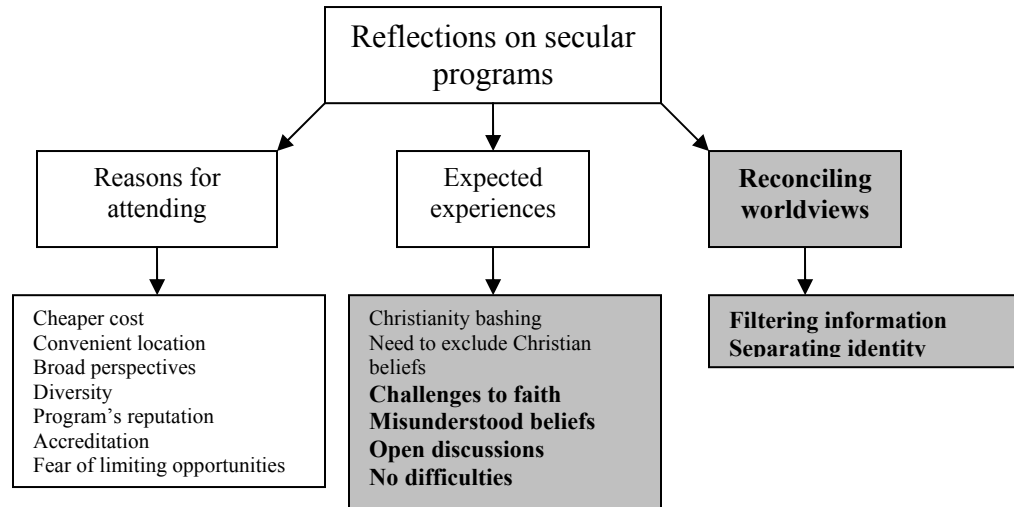
Participants provided additional expectations during the second round of interviews. A new theme, reconciling worldviews, also emerged. Figure 5 is a visual representation of the first category's additional themes and descriptors.

Expected experiences. Additional expectations were described during the second round of interviews. New expectations included: (a) challenges to faith, (b) misunderstood beliefs, (c) open discussions and (d) no difficulties. For example, Matthew and Chloe reported they expected to be challenged and misunderstood in their Christian faith and beliefs.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| <i>Matthew</i> | I expected there would be a negative outlook towards Christianity or certain Christian ideas would be challenged. I didn't think my experience would be easy or that faculty and students would understand where I was coming from. |
| <i>Chloe</i> | Being in the south, I didn't think Christian faith would be that big of a deal, but I thought my faith would be misunderstood or not accepted or received well at a secular university. I was apprehensive thinking I wouldn't feel comfortable or professors or students might openly disagree with me, especially since my masters degree is in integration between Christianity and psychology. |

Figure 5

Second Round Summary of Category I: Reflections on Secular Programs



Matthew seemed to anticipate the expected challenge to his faith with enthusiasm.

Matthew I went to a Christian undergraduate program, so I didn't want to go to a Christian masters' degree program and just get another Christian perspective. I like to be and wanted my faith challenged.

Matthew attributed expectation of his faith being challenged to a belief that there would be liberal ideology at most secular institutions, especially amongst faculty.

Matthew I understand the liberal climate at most secular universities amongst the faculty... There is a liberal position on issues such as sexual orientation, abortion or even social welfare programs. I almost want to say it is a well known fact.

Chloe's expectations of having her faith challenged, misunderstood or not accepted were attributed to a belief that people were not going to be receptive to Christianity.

Chloe The big thing is to be open to everything and anything goes. I could be almost any other religion and people would think that was interesting or intriguing and they would want to hear about it, but if individuals talk about Christianity, the same people who want me to be open are closed off to what I have to think or say.

Two participants did not expect their faith to pose any problems.

Peter I would expect there to be a Christian tone in the education process here in the South and the Bible belt. I expected more of a scientific approach where highly educated professionals would rationalize and not be faith oriented, because of their scientific upbringing, but I haven't seen a whole lot of that.

Leah I didn't expect anything negative, any problems or having to question my faith. I didn't really expect spiritual or faith-based conversations or topics to come up or be part of this program.

In contrast to Peter and Leah, Elizabeth expected faith to be discussed more openly. She felt disappointed that it was not.

Elizabeth I felt disappointed. I thought spirituality and faith issues would be openly discussed, but when they were mentioned, the focus was changed from spiritual issues to reducing and analyzing religious and spiritual phenomenon to psychological explanations. I thought as a counseling issue, spirituality is and would be important to most people, and therefore important in counseling education, but spirituality didn't seem to be important.

Reconciling worldviews. Respondents appeared to reconcile or integrate Christian and secular worldviews in one of two manners in an academic context. Participants either appeared to engage in a filtering process in which they incorporated secular education that agreed with their beliefs and values and dismissed concepts that did not, or separated their Christian identity from their counseling identity. For example, four participants reported that they engaged in a filtering process.

Matthew Humanistic ideals are in essence Christian ideals with the absence of God. Whereas humanistic ideals may suggest there is no room for God or counseling is all about the person, I see where it is all about the person, but in relationship to God. I take the good and leave the bad from what I'm learning in classes and see what can be used in my and clients' relationship with God.

Chloe Reconciliation is easy. If Christians are grounded in their faith and hear something that doesn't coincide with Biblical truth, they can filter that out. As a Christian open to integration, I'm not saying I

can only use the Bible, because there's a lot of value in secular psychology and sciences. I believe God created human beings and their thought processes and emotions, so as psychologists discover something about the human beings God created, that doesn't make it disagree with the Bible, because it is truth. If an idea is truth, it is not going to contradict what I believe.

Matthew provided some specific examples of concepts that were described as Christian principles and had value to him as a Christian student.

Matthew A lot of ideas don't match the way I see individuals or humanity, and I don't take everything professors say as 100 percent. I find the nuggets that are truth, match my value set and beliefs and apply that as I see fit... I incorporate ideas such as unconditional positive regard, genuineness and empathy with my own beliefs, because they are Christian ideals and something Christ would do.

On one hand, Elizabeth suggested that it was important for students to know what they believed in regards to Christian and secular worldviews, what to accept and what to reject. At times, she thought students may need to make decisions based on the difference in worldviews.

Elizabeth I have to know myself and what I believe. At times, I will have to take a stand, refer clients or even differ with major organizations like ACA. I give my dues to the American Association of Christian Counselors. I don't have to tell homosexuals that what they are doing is fine just because I'm a counselor. That is not respecting my own views and I need to be honest with myself.

On the other hand, Elizabeth stated that if as a Christian, the counselor distinguished the worth of a person from the behavior the person was engaged in, the counselor might be able to work with the client, if the client was willing to work with the counselor.

Elizabeth Counselors might feel comfortable because as Christians, they love that person. If clients ask what counselors think, it may be time to reveal the counselors don't agree with an act, but still care about the clients and are willing to help them deal with whatever they are dealing with. At the same time, counselors should never lie to clients or misrepresent themselves as if they approve of something when they do not.

Two participants stated they reconciled Christian and secular worldviews by separating their Christian identity from their counseling identity in a counseling context while attempting to incorporate tolerance and respect for diversity. There seemed to be an implied tension or confusion as the two participants attempted to separate Christian and counselor identity.

Leah Part of being a counselor is using my own personality... Since my religious beliefs are part of my personality and who I am, I can't say that they are never there or take them away from who I am. I'm in the room, but I don't bring up statements of religious belief.

Rebecca I bring my Christian values into session as far as how I respond in a loving and encouraging way. From a religious standpoint, I don't talk about or impose Christianity, but I am a product of Christianity. I can't separate Christianity from myself, change the way my personality has been formed, and totally turn everything off. I mean, if I'm not a Christian, I don't know who I am.

Category II: Experiences Attending Secular Programs

Information provided during the second round of interviews confirmed participants' experiences were mostly positive. Participants reflected on experiences and provided new data related to positive and negative experiences. Figure 6 is a visual representation of the second category, and themes and descriptors that emerged.

Positive experiences. Two new positive descriptors emerged during the second round of interviews: (a) Christian peer support and (b) accommodation to religious activities. Participants also offered explanations as to what might have contributed to two participants reporting all positive experiences.

Sarah stated the importance of support from other Christians as a positive experience. She speculated that her experience may have been different if support from Christians was not available.

Sarah The fact that my placement is a Christian environment has helped. I don't know if my feelings would be different, if I wasn't getting Christian support anywhere. In this city many people go to church and the majority of people I work with are devout Christians, so having that has been very encouraging.

Contrary to Sarah's initial interview and her report of time conflicts between program requirements and religious activities, she stated a graduate assistant was accommodating to her religious activities.

Sarah I have to schedule check out time in testing with a graduate student. The times he was available were times when I'd be in church, Sunday from 10 to noon, five to seven or Wednesday night. No one else in the class had problems with that time except for me. He was willing to schedule another time.

Difficult experiences. Two participants described recent experiences that were difficult and confirmed prior themes. An added difficult experience described was encountering a biased social-psychology theory. Participants also explored the causes and impact of negative perceptions. Coping with difficult experiences and responses to derogatory labels also emerged as new descriptors.

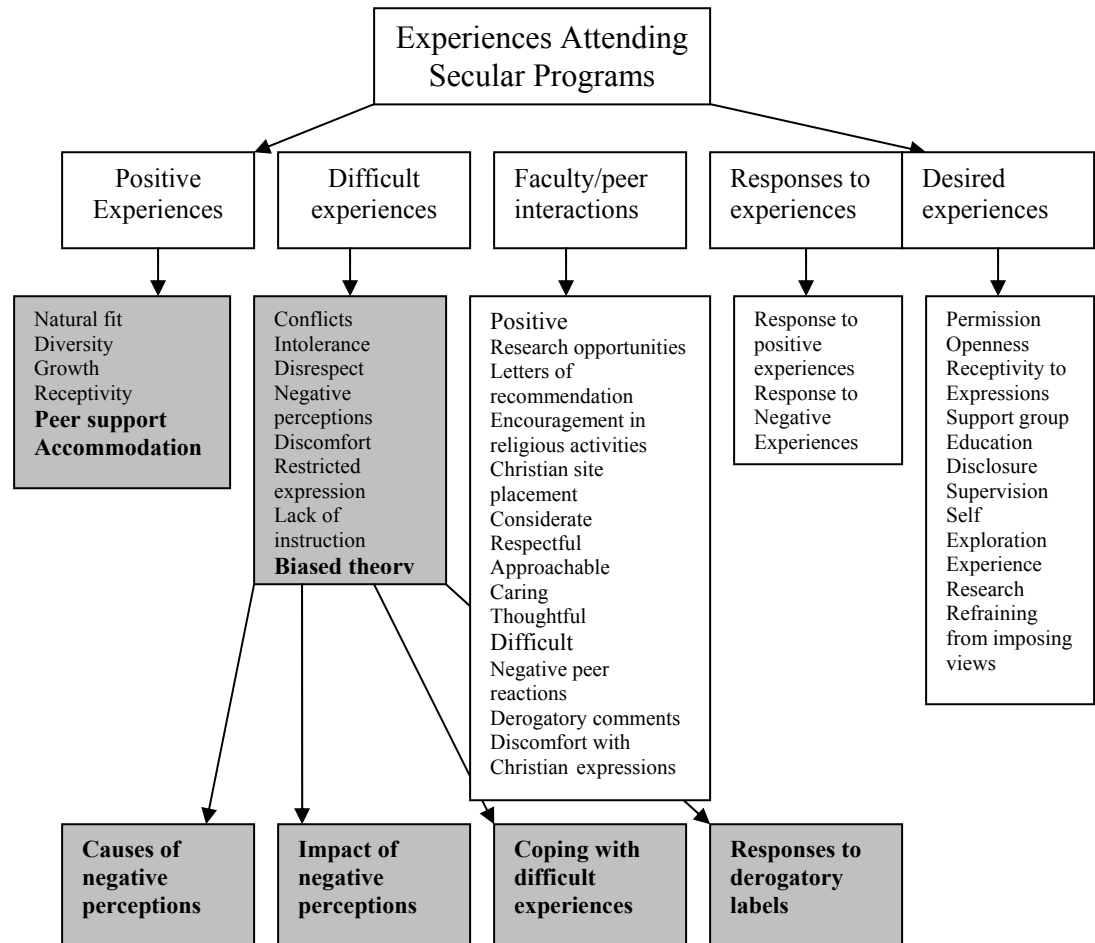
Sarah stated she had a class discussion related to a biased social psychology theory. She looked and sounded irritated as she disclosed her experience.

Sarah In a social psychology class, people talked about religion as a crutch for trying to cope with death. The discussion was about the terror management theory... it was complete crap and there was no basis for it.

Causes of negative perceptions. Three additional participants confirmed others hold negative perceptions of Christians. Participants attributed several causes to negative perceptions and thought they were heard more from peers than faculty. Negative perceptions were attributed to: (a) generalizations or stereotypes, (b) transference, (c) fear of influence, (e) manner of expression, and (f) personal perceptions.

Figure 6

Second Round Summary of Category II: Experiences Attending Secular Programs



Some participants attributed negative perceptions to generalizations or stereotypes. Two participants stated generalizations or stereotypes may come from people who have had bad Christian experiences that are then over-generalized and global assumptions are made about all Christians or Christianity.

Matthew

Negative outlooks towards Christians come from peoples' negative experiences. Someone who claims Christianity comes at people without love, with hatred and does something negative in the name of Christ, and leaves a bad taste in somebody's mouth. It's an overgeneralization taking one experience and making it a blanket experience for all of Christianity. People who have had negative experiences automatically assume all Christians are hateful and unloving.

Similarly, Sarah offered negative perceptions are due to negative media publicity.

Sarah The media portrayal is showing only one side.. There may be a news show where people are for homosexuality, and then there's a Christian or Southern Baptist group that's always against it. We're always portrayed as being against everything and not for anything.

Two participants implied transference was a cause of negative perceptions where people may be directing inner religious or spiritual struggles onto Christians.

Chloe Sometimes, people are very hostile to Christianity. People who have negative perceptions may be having spiritual struggles, because God has been working on them.

Rebecca His response came from within and was one of his inner struggles projected toward me. He claims Christianity, but states he accepts all worldviews and is struggling within himself to reconcile how he could be a Christian and everything else at the same time. I struck a cord with him, because a person can't be a Christian, Buddhist and Muslim all at the same time.

Other respondents offered that people know Christianity is the truth, but because they are not living accordingly or fear being influenced, they maintain negative perceptions.

Matthew People who hold negative perceptions want to feel good about themselves but realize there is truth in Christianity, so they get defensive if somebody else is living a righteous Christian life. It creates a collision of worldviews and people say, "you are wrong and shouldn't believe Christianity."

Chloe Maybe deep down inside people who hold negative perceptions know Christianity is the truth, and they just don't want to hear it. Reading or talking about other beliefs and religions is a lot easier if there's no threat that people are going to be swayed in a religion's direction.

The final explanation as to why others have negative perceptions of Christians is the delivery or manner some Christians express their faith.

Leah Some people misunderstand Christians depending on how the Christians profess their faith. For example, in front of the student union, people can say whatever they want. Once, I was there and Christians were preaching, but they were just screaming scriptures.

Sometimes the Christians get heated, loud and aren't listening to others and people walking by get a misconception.

Two participants implied that there were no negative perceptions of Christians or Christianity, but rather students' own sensitivities accounted for negative perceptions.

Peter Perception has a lot to do with experiences and people hear what they want to hear. Graduate students are sensitive and their opinions are so strong that they are easily upset in what others may say.

Leah There's always going to be people who are negative about something, so there's probably going to be people who are negative about Christians. So, it isn't a problem, if I don't sit around and think, "oh, people don't understand Christians."

When negative perceptions did occur, participants suggested those perceptions could affect Christian students in several ways including: (a) deepening faith, (b) becoming more accepting, (c) becoming more cautious about disclosures, (d) pointing out that not being receptive to Christian views is being intolerant, (e) leaving the counseling profession or abandoning Christian perspectives in counseling, or (f) having no impact. Rebecca suggested that when negative perceptions or misperceptions did occur, the influence would depend upon the students and whether the students were "strong" or "weak" in their faith.

One respondent stated his faith was deepened, his beliefs were solidified and he became a stronger Christian in the face of challenge.

Matthew I liked the challenge and to be able to hear different viewpoints and good clean arguments. Challenge caused me to deepen my own faith and solidified what I believed.

Leah stated she became a stronger Christian as she became more accepting as her beliefs changed from viewing issues from a religious perspective to a counseling perspective.

Leah The program made me a better and stronger Christian to not think of what people are doing as sin and increased my faith to know that it is not about what other people are doing that affects my religious beliefs, but what I am doing. The program hasn't made me say don't think about issues in a Christian or religious way, but to embrace what people are doing in a new more accepting way.

Two other participants thought negative perceptions would influence Christians in one of several ways. The participants thought Christian students might withdraw and maintain Christian faith, but become more cautious about disclosures in order to prevent negative perceptions and being labeled. Students might continue to discuss faith and point out that not being receptive to Christian views is being intolerant or leave the counseling profession or abandon incorporation of Christian views into counseling,

Elizabeth Impact may occur in several ways. Christian students can maintain their faith, be quiet and not bring it up in counselor education. Christian students could continue to bring their views up and point out that not accepting their views is not respecting them, as counselors are taught to respect other people's opinions and worldviews, even though they may not approve of them. Christian students could get out of counseling, or abandon incorporating Christian counseling into any counseling they do.

Sarah Christian students may be cautious about disclosing information for fear that people will jump to a negative conclusion and automatically label Christians instead of actually finding out what Christians believe or the reasons for their beliefs.

Similarly, Matthew questioned his choice of attending a secular program, because of the negative attitudes and intolerance he perceived. He stated he believed negative attitudes were unique to Christians and would not be held toward other faiths.

Matthew I had this overwhelming sense of "am I in the right place? Is this the right school for me? Should I have chosen a Christian program?" I felt very defensive about my faith, because of the judgmental attitudes towards Christians. If I were to say I was a Buddhist or Muslim, nobody would have those attitudes towards me. There seems to be intolerance to Christianity as a whole... I almost feel threatened for my existence.

Chloe stated “negative perceptions haven’t affected me one way or the other.” The final participant suggested that the affect on Christian students would depend on the students and whether the students were “strong” or “weak” in their faith.

Rebecca The influence of negative perceptions depends on where students are in their spiritual development. If students are strong in their faith, they might react by getting driven to know more so they can get stronger in their faith to be able to have a debate and stand their ground against other people. If students have a weak personality and are easily influenced, negative perceptions could be hindering and frustrating.

Coping with difficult experiences. The primary means of coping with difficult experiences was discussing difficulties with Christian friends and family members.

Matthew I cope by talking with people in my church and with friends about the things that go on and how I’m being challenged on a day by day basis. I get feedback as far as if am I right to feel the way that I feel and to get validation from fellow Christians.

Sarah If I have a rough day or don’t understand something, I talk about it with family or friends who let me vent. Most of my friends and family are Christians, so they understand where I’m coming from, especially since this is the first secular program I’ve ever attended. Sometimes, I think about difficulties and figure out how to approach them differently the next time, so I can learn from them.

Elizabeth reported that she withdrew from difficult situations, reflected, prayed, and matured to cope with them. She also reported becoming more vocal than she had been in the past.

Elizabeth My first thought would be that faculty don’t understand Christian values. Eight years ago, I withdrew and decided to think and pray about the program and mature more. Now, my style is to back off until I know exactly what I need to do. I wouldn’t do the program the same way that I did eight years ago. I don’t tend to speak before I think or pray, but I do speak out more now.

One participant did not process difficulties with faculty or peers, because he was not sure if processing difficult experiences would be appropriate, understood, or received.

Matthew I haven't processed any of my thoughts or feelings with faculty or peers that I've had difficult experiences with. I don't feel comfortable. I don't know if there's anybody I could really talk to. I didn't know how appropriate telling faculty, "I'm a Christian, and I'm having problems with some of these ideas" would be... how that would be received or what reactions would be. I didn't know if the problems would be open for discussion.

Although Matthew believed faculty were balanced in their viewpoints, he clarified the reason he was unsure as to whether he could approach faculty with his difficulties.

Matthew For the most part, my experience with the faculty is that they have been balanced with their viewpoint. However, there is this unspoken rule. I get the perception that faculty don't want me to discuss faith, but it's nothing that's out in the open.

Response to derogatory labels. Some participants reported that others acted on negative perceptions and labeled Christians closed minded or intolerant. Participants attributed labels to: (a) others not understanding the Bible or Christian beliefs, (b) others misunderstanding the difference between accepting people as opposed to ideas, values and behavior, or (c) Christians being intolerant.

Matthew, Elizabeth, and Chloe affirmed that they were accepting, loving, and open to others and did not judge other people. However, they did judge behavior, ideas, and values and did not waiver in their perspectives.

Matthew I am open to other people, what they think, feel and experience. The reason Christians get labeled closed-minded or intolerant is our belief that Christ is the only way and answer to every problem. If people were to find Christ and have a relationship with Him, they would no longer worry about certain issues because Christ is there to help. Automatically, people are put off.

Elizabeth In some ways Christians are intolerant, not of other people but of peoples' views. What God says is wrong is wrong and what is right is right. There is no gray area. However, loving other people is always right, but that does not necessarily entail accepting what they do, but rather loving them because they have value.

Sarah In my experience, most Christians are pretty open about finding out about other people's experiences, but don't necessarily waiver in their own beliefs. Christians don't compromise.

Two respondents implied that others label Christians not because of Christians' behavior, but rather because of their perspectives or beliefs.

Matthew Not understanding grace and depositing it onto others causes a judgmental perception. I'm not judgmental or say, "you're going to die and go to hell," because that is not my decision. I don't tell people that you have to do this or that, but there are some Christians that do. I believe in the grace of God and that it is lavished upon people, because God loves them. He understands we are human and make mistakes... His love far outweighs anger or judgment.

Sarah I could see how some of the things we believe and don't waiver on can come across as being intolerant. We're getting a bad rap, because we hold to a teaching, say something is wrong, and we're labeled intolerant, but it is not like we don't listen to other people or don't want to hear anything else. There are some situations that tear at my heart, but the Bible is there for protection and living a godly life. God has designed us, and I have to trust God knows best ...and believe in the entire Bible, not just pieces of it.

Chloe stated that in a sense, Christianity was a closed-minded faith in regards to Jesus being the only path to God. However, she believed Christians were taught to accept and love others even if they disagreed with other's behaviors or lifestyles.

Chloe The world perceives Christianity as a closed-minded faith. I believe there is one truth and one way to God through Jesus Christ. If people want to call believing there's one truth, and way to God closed-minded, then I guess I am closed-minded. But, anyone who has read the Bible or studied the teachings of Jesus would have to agree that Jesus showed love and accepted everybody even if He didn't agree with what they were doing.

Chloe added that being a Christian did not make someone closed-minded. She described being closed-minded or intolerant as a personality trait that any person could have.

Chloe There are closed-minded Christians and non-Christians as far as accepting people. Being a Christian doesn't make a person any

more closed-minded than anyone else. Being closed-minded is some other category, a personality trait or something.

Peter responded that derogatory labels were due to misunderstandings of absolute beliefs. He implied Christians could hold to absolutes for themselves and did not have to impose them on others.

Peter It's possible to hold to Christian absolutes and still be open-minded, because Christianity and what you perceive as right and wrong is inside of you. If someone is offended or has a problem with hearing someone else's views or working with someone who doesn't have the same values, that person is in the wrong profession.

Peter suggested that perception accounted for some of the reasons Christian students might perceive that they are being told that they are close-minded or intolerant.

Peter It is hard for a professor to explain to students that they can't impose their belief on clients. I could see how students would interpret that as saying you're close-minded, but it's a perception issue.

Finally, two respondents thought some Christian students were labeled closed minded because they might be closed-minded or intolerant.

Rebecca I would hope that people would take step back and think, "maybe I am coming across closed-minded and intolerant and need to work on being open-minded. I can have Christian views, but I need to realize that there is a time and place for everything."

Category III: Christian Identity

In descriptions related to expression of Christian perspectives, beliefs and values, participants reported in-depth on the appropriate context and manner for expressions. Participants also illuminated new descriptors in identity change. Figure 7 is a visual representation of the third category, themes and descriptors.

Appropriate context for expression. Most respondents stated an appropriate context for expressing Christian beliefs or values would include relevance to dialog such as: (a) spirituality, religion and ethics, (b) personal values, (c) client issues, (d) treatment planning or (e) faculty or student prompting. Participants seemed to agree that Christian expressions would be inappropriate to share randomly. Two participants reported that they thought Christian expressions were appropriate at any time, because a worldview permeates everything.

Peter Expressions are appropriate if they relate to the class discussion, for example, if values and beliefs are brought up. Religion is just as important as any other topic. Students have to address their beliefs before they get out there as a professional. Expressions would be inappropriate if brought up out of context.

Leah An appropriate context would be if a professor said, “we’re going to talk about spiritual topics that could come up in counseling and the spiritual experience and history that students bring into counseling.” Other appropriate contexts would be if another student said, “I’m interested to hear about a different perspective on a spiritual topic” ... or in papers when we have to talk about how the world colors us and how we see ourselves as counselors.

Elizabeth In ethics, a lot of religious and spiritual issues come up and lend themselves to discussions. Expressing any opinion is just that, the facts of what I believe. It is not about shoving beliefs on somebody or going on and on... Expressions would also be appropriate in discussion of a case or in treatment planning.

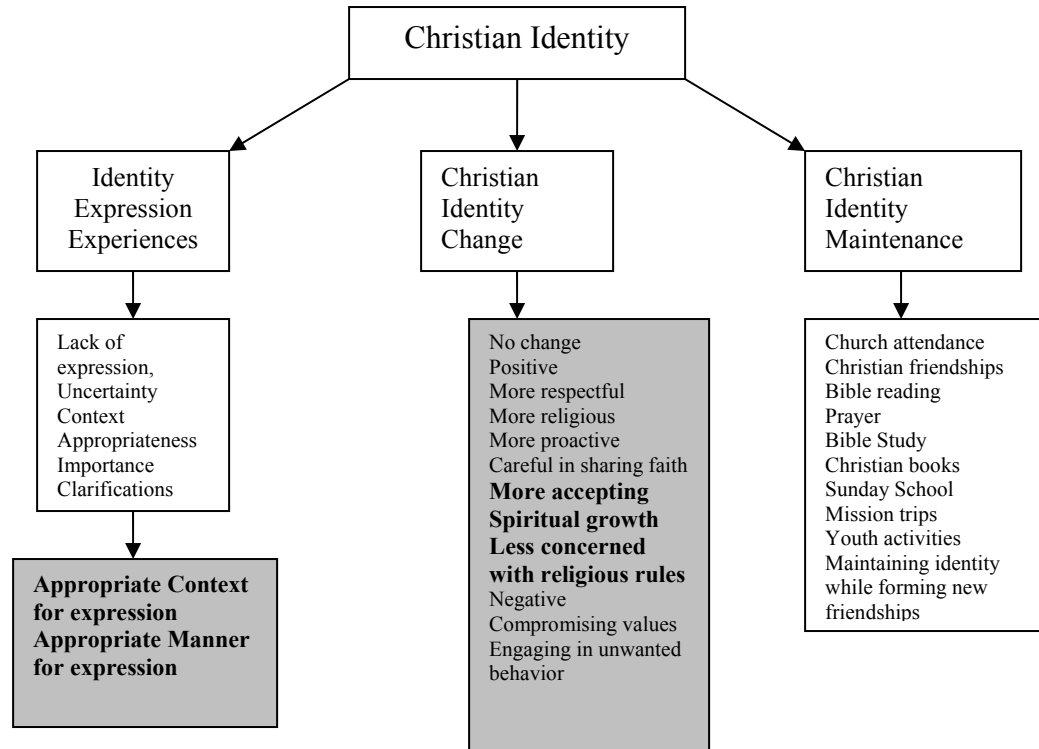
Peter seemed to continue to contradict himself in regards to the appropriate context for expression.

Peter Although I’m saying that spirituality is part of the substance abuse recovery process, that can’t be told to a client. Spirituality has to be developed from within clients. I would offer information, but not advice.

Finally, two participants stated Christian perspectives were appropriate at any time in all contexts. Chloe provided a specific example.

Figure 7

Second Round Summary of Category III: Christian Identity



Matthew I don't see anywhere that Christian beliefs would be inappropriate to integrate. Value systems are very important as far as counseling is concerned.

Chloe The appropriate context is any time I feel led to express my beliefs... Once, a student said, "I don't understand why this client is insistent that the Bible is true." I had an opportunity to give that person some insight about why that client might insist that the Bible is true and share ways the student could work with the Bible and client's beliefs rather than being frustrated by them. The student didn't believe everything in the Bible was true and was frustrated. The student wanted to say, "the Bible is not true," but couldn't because that's not appropriate. I shared ways counselors could use the client's beliefs to assist in the therapy process.

Appropriate manner for expression. Participants described the appropriate manner of expression in several ways to include: (a) owning the expressions, (b) refraining from universal statements, (c) being open, non-threatening and non-

judgmental, (d) listening to others, (e) clarifying that the expressions are not meant to impose beliefs, (f) being careful about the words used, (g) discussing as would any other topic, and (h) being genuine, honest, and respectful.

- Matthew* The appropriate “how” would be where I clarify that I am not there to impose my beliefs on others. When I discuss what I think and feel, I should do so in a non-judgmental manner with understanding... being careful of how I choose my words, saying “this is what I believe and why I believe what I believe.”
- Peter* If [people] are highly opinionated and don’t tolerate other’s opinions, they need to tone the expression down ... It is one thing to talk about beliefs, but it’s another to soap box on them.
- Rebecca* Owning beliefs for myself is appropriate... discussing them in an open-minded non-threatening way. Take on a listener role, yet state my views. Give everybody a chance to talk.
- Leah* Expression wouldn’t be a different tone or need a special manner of delivery. It’s the same method you talk about anything in class.
- Chloe* The easiest and most appropriate way is to do what’s comfortable... The main thing is to express my beliefs with respect and make sure I’m saying what’s true and not watered down, because my beliefs won’t be accepted. Most people are open to hearing what I have to say if I say it respectfully. It has been easy for me to talk about Christian beliefs because my master’s degree is from seminary and faculty and peers know my background, why I’m talking about Christian beliefs and are not resistant to my expressions.

Respondents stated that religion and spirituality are not addressed in an academic setting due to: (a) fear of offending others, (b) lack of understanding related to spirituality, (c) lack of time, (d) large classroom settings, and (e) and a historical tradition of not discussing religion and spirituality.

- Matthew* People don’t understand what spirituality is, the holistic view of a person, not just religion. If spirituality was communicated more by faculty, it could be integrated to a larger degree.

Rebecca Nobody wants to step on any toes. There's been such a theme of equality, free your mind, don't judge people and everybody can do what they want to do that nobody takes a stand anymore. People are realizing that spirituality is important and a part of a lot of people's lives. Now that we've established equality, we can look at things that define humans in general.

Elizabeth The reason is the tradition of spirituality and religion not being discussed and the nature of the field. Looking back on the origins of counseling, I never saw where spiritual issues were discussed. I read an article about an increased focus on spiritual issues among psychologists, now. The article said that psychologists tend to be non-spiritually oriented as people, more so than in other fields.

Identity change. Participants continued to describe various changes while attending secular counseling and counseling psychology programs and reaffirmed changes were not directly related to attending their program. For example, Matthew reported that he changed in that he was more accepting of people, however the change just so happened while he was in his program, but was not due to being in the program.

Matthew I've changed in a lot of ways back and forth. The program has not necessarily influenced or changed my beliefs... More than anything, I've grown more open and accepting of people ... Change is not necessarily directly related to being in the program, but rather the stage of life I'm in and the choices I've made.

Similarly Peter and Elizabeth stated they had changed as Christians, and although the program had complimented or supplemented change, the three participants did not attribute change directly to their programs.

Peter I changed, but not as a result of the program. I'm in a constant mode of change by my existence and what I know and learn. Change is inevitable.

Elizabeth The program has not taken anything away, but has added to or supplemented change.

Rebecca stated being in a secular university had caused her to be more proactive in and responsible for her faith.

Rebecca All my life church has been offered once a week, so it was easy. Attending a secular university has made it not so easy for me to have spirituality handed to me and made me stronger in that I had to be proactive and seek it out myself and church outside of the university. I didn't just drop spirituality altogether because it wasn't spoon fed to me.

Leah stated her program added to her spiritual growth, but not her Christian identity. She stated she was more open-minded, and believed she was a stronger Christian.

Leah The program might have added to some of my spiritual growth, but not my Christian identity ... Becoming more aware of other people, what's going on in their lives, and not as closed-minded as I was before had helped me grow into a stronger Christian.

Leah also reported changes in her spiritual and religious beliefs as learning not to be concerned so much with religious rules or teachings. This seemed to imply a contradiction to her professed faith as affirmed in her demographic questionnaire in regards to her agreement with the Nicene Creed. Leah stated she was not sure if her beliefs changed because of her attendance in a secular program.

Leah The program helped me look at people in a better light, not judging them for what might be considered a sin in a Christian perspective, but instead learning things from a counseling perspective ... I'm here to accept whatever the clients say. I'm not here to judge or say what the client is doing is right or wrong... I don't know that change is in conjunction with my learning, but in the last year or two I have been leaning more to not worrying about religious rules or teachings, and learning more about God's love, how God's love applies to me and the way to be a better Christian is to give more love. The beliefs are similar to person-centered counseling.

Summary of Second Round Interviews

Participant data during the second round of interviews confirmed the first category, *reflections on secular programs*, and all of its themes. Additional experiences and descriptions were described in the first category's existing theme, *expected experiences*, as well as a new theme, *reconciling worldviews*.

Participant data during the second round of interviews also confirmed the second category, *experiences attending secular programs*, and all of its themes. Additional experiences and descriptions were explored in the second category's existing themes, as well as new themes and descriptors that included: (a) causes of negative perceptions, (b) impact of negative perceptions, (c), coping with difficult experiences, and (d) response to labels.

Finally, respondents confirmed the third category, *Christian identity* and all of its themes. Additional experiences and descriptions were explored in the final category's existing themes, as well as new themes and descriptors which included *appropriate context and manner for expression*.

Figure 8 is a visual representation of the summary of categories and themes that emerged during the second round of interviews. New descriptors and sub-themes were not included in figure (9) for *expected experiences*, *positive experiences*, *difficult experiences* and *identity change* due to space limitations. Findings from the initial round and second round interviews were utilized to develop questions for the final round of interviews which are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Third Round of Individual interviews

The third round of interviews was specifically focused on review of findings, clarification of participant responses, and validation of the accuracy of participant experiences. At the start of the interview, each participant was instructed to read and review the category, theme titles, descriptors, as well as the investigations findings during the first two rounds of interviews to become familiar with the overall material. Participants and I then read through the summary of each of the participant's experiences

related to each category, theme and descriptor and participants commented on whether the findings accurately portrayed their experiences.

Third round interview questions were: (a) Are there any changes you would like to make to the category or theme names or do they accurately fit for you, (b) Having read through the findings, do you have any initial thoughts, general reactions or is there anything that stands out to you, (c) Do the findings accurately reflect your experiences, (e) Is there anything you would like to add, change or clarify, and (f) Is there anything else that you think is important that you would like to express?

Analysis of Final Interviews

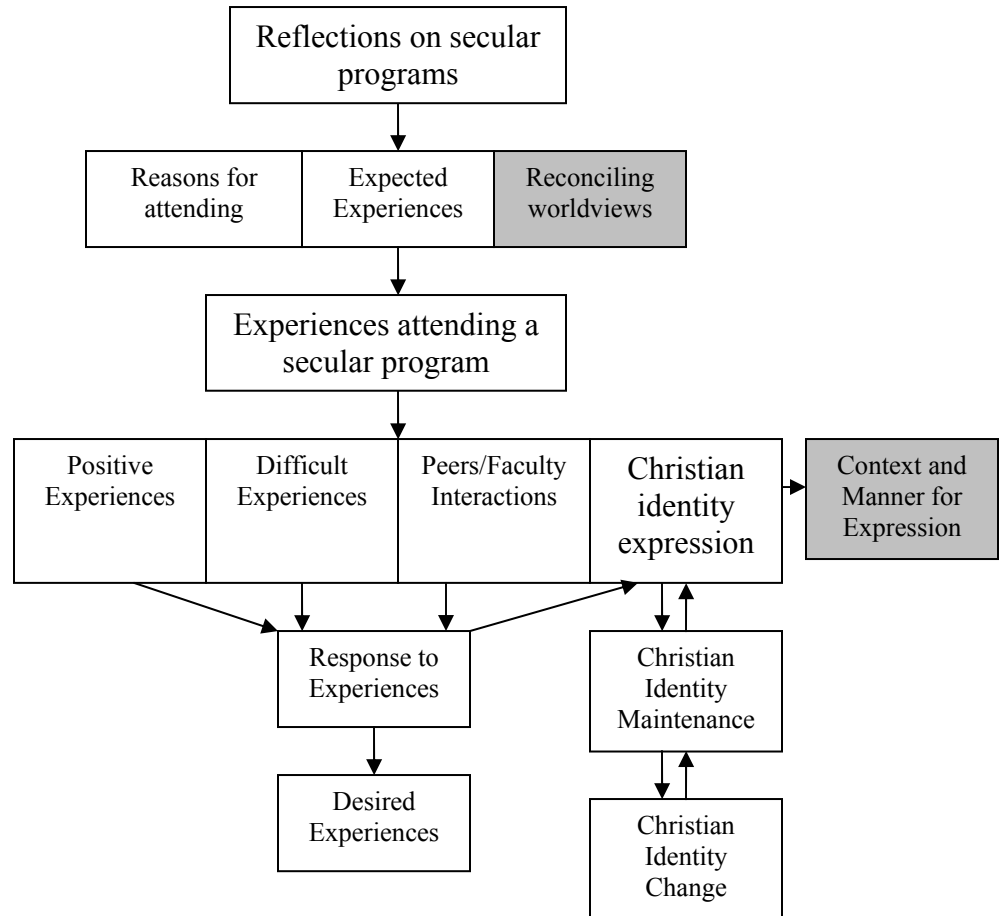
Data obtained from the final interviews were transcribed from audiotape by a professional transcriptionist. Analysis began as each transcript was completed. Each transcript was reviewed for accuracy and read for familiarity. Next, initial coding was performed, then recoded and within case analysis was conducted. Within case analysis was then reviewed and detailed. Cross-case analysis was then conducted, reviewed and detailed. Finally, data were re-organized and developed into existing categories and themes.

Reflections on Overall Findings

Information gathered during final interviews was organized into the initial three categories that pertained to Christian students' experiences: (a) reflections on secular programs, (b) experiences attending secular programs, and (c) Christian identity. Analysis procedures were utilized to confirm categories, broaden existing themes, and illuminate any new information that pertained to Christian students' experiences while

Figure 8

Summary of Second Round Interviews



attending secular counseling and counseling psychology programs. Based upon participants' responses, all of the existing categories, themes and descriptors developed from the first and second round of interviews were supported and little new information was provided by participants.

Overall, participants reflected that respondents had a variety of experiences while attending a secular program. Although some participants were surprised at the findings and experiences of other respondents, they thought the reported experiences were reasonable and within the scope of what an investigation might find. Participants

reported that the categories, themes and descriptors were consistent with their own experiences or were surprised at others' experiences that were greatly different from their own.

Reflections on Categories and Themes

All four of the participants responding to the final interview stated that the category and thematic list correlated well with what was discussed during the interviews, reflected participant responses accurately, and that no changes to the category or thematic names were needed.

Category I: Reflections on Secular Programs

Little new information was provided to the first category. Participants clarified or added new insights into themes of *reasons for attending*, and *reconciling worldviews*.

Two participants added that they did not consider going to a Christian counseling program; however, both respondents still would have chosen a secular program.

Rebecca I never even thought about going to a Christian counseling program and didn't know there were Christian programs. I didn't think about Christianity when I chose a secular university.

Leah I didn't make a conscious choice and didn't even consider going to a Christian counseling program.

In response to two participants stating Christians needed to separate their Christian identity from their counselor role, Chloe stated that separating Christian identity from professional identity is dangerous and leads to accepting and doing things that are not consistent with one's Christian identity.

Chloe Separating Christian identity from professional identity is a dangerous a slippery slope. While I might not talk about faith issues all the time in my professional world, it's still part of my identity. If I separate my identity, because it is not accepted or

respected in a certain field, I have the danger of doing things that I wouldn't normally do as a Christian.

Category II: Experiences Attending Secular Programs

Similar to the first category, little additional information was provided to the second category during the third round interview. Participants provided some reflections on themes of *faculty and peer interactions, reactions to experiences* and *desired experiences*.

Peter attributed reports of difficult faculty experiences to miscommunication and could not imagine faculty being intolerant. However, he could understand difficult experiences from students because he thought it was normal for students to debate on a college campus.

Peter Maybe difficult experiences are a miscommunication. I can't see my faculty being misrepresentative of other schools in this area, and can't imagine a faculty member being intolerant of someone's beliefs or religion. There are arguments that are related to Christian beliefs, because students are sowing their oats, and it's normal for young people to argue who are debate oriented and trying to understand their own beliefs, much less other people's beliefs. Arguments are healthy and there's nothing wrong with them.

Peter was also surprised that a participant would fear repercussions and become more withdrawn.

Peter It surprises me that Christian students feared repercussions related to expression of Christian beliefs and became withdrawn. Christians shouldn't be afraid of expressing their opinions. Somebody disagreeing with a Christian is not a good reason for Christians to not express their faith or beliefs and doesn't make sense unless they are not comfortable in their beliefs.

Contrary to earlier disclosure, Peter seemed inconsistent in that he thought reports for a desire for a more open environment would be more appropriate in a Christian

environment and that there were already Christian organizations where Christians could receive support and express themselves.

Peter Christian expression would be more appropriate in a Christian environment. I would be surprised if Christian students didn't try to find more opportunities to go to a Christian school if they had the need to express Christian beliefs... There are Christian organizations on campus that offer support, sharing and opportunity to express faith and to worship. I can't imagine that people feel there is not a forum or group for Christian discussions.

Category III: Christian Identity

As in the previous first and second category, little additional information was provided in *Christian identity* during the third round interview. Participants provided some reflections on themes of *appropriate context and manner for expression*, and *identity maintenance*.

Peter seemed to affirm findings related to appropriateness for classroom discussion, but suggested Christian expression couldn't be expected in a public university. He seemed to contradict himself in all three interviews.

Peter In the right context, Christian expression is appropriate even in a state university. I found that most classes are open when discussing religion and spirituality ... I can't expect openness to discuss religion and spirituality at a state run university. I would have hoped religion and spirituality would be part of the experience, but with the way government is and trying to keep church and government away from each other, it puts officials behind the eight ball.

Peter stated again, he did not think Christian students could expect an open environment for discussion related to Christian beliefs and that people have to expect others to disagree with Christians.

Peter I can't expect receptivity of any perspective. I've got to go with what I believe and whether it is received well or not depends upon my audience. I shouldn't expect receptivity from the student body.

If I'm at a Christian university I would expect receptivity, because of the Christian university's faith based education, but not at a secular university. I can have the expectation, but I'm going to be disappointed.

Identity maintenance. Leah reported an additional way she maintained her Christian identity was doing volunteer work and outreach in her community.

Leah Volunteering and providing outreach for the community are other ways that I maintain my Christian identity.

Third Round Interview Summary

Information gathered during the final interviews was organized into the initial three categories: (a) reflections on secular programs, (b) experiences attending secular programs, and (c) Christian identity. Based upon participants' responses, all of the existing categories, themes, and descriptors developed from the first and second round of interviews were supported. The fact that little new information was provided by participants during the third round of interviews may be an indicator that the categories, themes, and descriptors were explained in depth.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification

Qualitative researchers are concerned with truthfulness of their results. Thus, the final stage of data analysis involved verification procedures. Verification procedures served to enhance the trustworthiness of my interpretations of the data and findings.

Multiple steps were taken to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of findings. My dissertation chair person and peer reviewer reviewed transcripts, reduction of data, and summary of memorandums. They also explored alternative conclusions to assist me from imposing any bias into the findings and analysis. Outliers, exceptions to usual verbal responses were also explored to guard against any bias. I maintained and

reviewed a reflexive journal to achieve as much objectivity as possible. Member checks were conducted to ensure accurate understanding of verbal and observed responses during the interviews. Finally, the concluding interview was conducted to determine whether the findings accurately reflected shared experiences.

Outliers and alternative explanations

At each stage of analysis, I searched for outliers and alternative possibilities for organizing themes and actively sought alternative explanations for emergent themes. I reviewed the literature in chapter two and compared the literature with my initial findings. Although a few of the concepts that were uncovered in data analysis were addressed in the existing literature thus giving credence for the themes and descriptions mentioned in this study, the perceptions and experiences of Christian students attending secular counseling and counseling graduate programs are not addressed in the literature. Therefore, available literature could not be utilized to suggest alternative explanations of the findings.

Triangulation Procedures

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that triangulation is the utilization of multiple data sources to corroborate themes that emerge throughout the process of data collection. In this investigation, I used triangulation as a verification procedure in order to enhance credibility. The use of multiple methods of data review provided support that findings were appropriate descriptions of the lived experiences of participants. Reflexive journal, member checks, peer debriefer, and consultation were used to achieve triangulation.

Member checks. Member checks were initiated early in data collection, analysis and throughout the investigation. Member checks involved soliciting feedback about

findings at each stage of interviews. Participants reviewed each theme and category and provided feedback to the name of each theme and category, the summary of the experiences related to each, and on whether the findings accurately portrayed their experiences. Participants remarks were supportive of findings and added data were used to expand the themes.

Consultation. As a final verification procedure, consultation was utilized with the chair of my dissertation committee. She has a depth of knowledge in working with qualitative research. She assisted me in bracketing any biases that may have contaminated the study as well as verified data collection and analysis procedures through our in-person meetings and communication. Each round of analysis was reviewed and discussed before moving to the next round of interviews. Based on her perceptions, she affirmed the findings were accurate representations of the participants' responses. She provided feedback continually on collapsing categories and reorganizing themes continually, and helped me with my interview questions. I illustrated the findings through within-case and cross case displays, which she critiqued. She also assisted with the consistent process of exploration and comparison among themes, descriptions, and findings.

Summary

This chapter presented findings that emerged from participants' responses to the research question: what are the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs? The results presented in this chapter reflect my analysis and interpretation of data collected in the form of (a) observations of each participant, (b) three rounds of

individual interviews, (c) a reflective journal, (d) reviews of data analysis by a faculty research advisor and peer reviewer, and (e) my personal knowledge of being a conservative orthodox Christian student attending a public, secular, accredited counseling graduate program.

This chapter was arranged into five main sections. The first section introduced participants who shared their experiences and contributed to this investigation. The second section included initial interview questions, themes, and categories that emerged from analysis of participants' responses, and a summary of the data that emerged from the first round of interviews. The third section followed the same format and included questions that were asked during the second round of individual interviews, as well as the themes that emerged from participants' responses during the second round of interviews. Details about a third and final round of individual interviews, when participants were presented with a summary of the overall findings that emerged from the analysis of participants' collective responses, was presented in the fourth section of this chapter. Finally, verification procedures were discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of chapter five is to discuss the findings of the study in context and explore implications. The purpose of the investigation and methodology are briefly reviewed. Then, a summary of findings is presented as they relate to the conceptual framework of the study and the literature review. Finally, limitations of the study, implications of findings, suggestions for further research, and personal reflections are discussed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students attending a public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate program. Christian students' perceptions and experiences were examined through individual interviews with seven participants. Students who chose to participate in this investigation were from master's level counselor education programs and a doctoral level counseling psychology program. The overall research question was: what are the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students attending a public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs?

Methodology

Data were collected through two rounds of semi-structured individual interviews and a concluding interview where findings were reviewed. Seven participants took part in the first two interviews. The final interview was conducted with only four of the seven respondents due to some participants' unresponsiveness or unavailability. One of the

third round interviews was conducted via phone due to travel constraints. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed for the purpose of data analysis.

Data Analysis

In order to elicit the meaning of participants' responses, each transcript was reviewed for accuracy and read for familiarity. Next, initial coding was performed and data were reduced into meaningful analyzable units. Meaningful chunks of data were then categorized based on their relationships to one another, and within case and cross-case analysis was conducted. Data displays were constructed to assist in analysis and to facilitate the development of conclusions. Data were then reorganized and developed into emerging categories, themes, and descriptors. Finally, analysis and summarizations were reviewed by an expert qualitative researcher and peer reviewer.

Summary of Findings

Although data analysis revealed a variety of participants' perceptions and experiences, three major categories emerged from the analysis of data. Each category was organized into themes that served to answer the research question in greater detail. Categories and themes were used to describe the collective experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students while attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs.

The three major categories included *reflections on secular programs*, *experiences attending secular programs*, and *Christian identity*. Themes underlying the first category, *reflections on secular programs*, were: (a) reasons for attending, (b) expected experiences, and (c) reconciling worldviews. Themes underlying the second category, *experiences attending secular programs*, were: (a) positive, (b) difficult, (c) faculty and

peer interactions, (d) response to experiences, and (e) desired experiences. Finally, themes underlying the third category, *Christian identity*, were: (a) identity expression, (b) identity change, and (c) identity maintenance.

Categories and Themes

Category I: Reflections on Secular Programs

Participants' responses illuminated three themes, *reasons for attending*, *expected experiences*, and *reconciling worldviews* as general reflections related to their experiences in secular programs. Most participants indicated that life circumstances, limitations, and choices influenced their decisions to attend secular programs. However, two participants stated they did not consciously make a decision to attend a secular program and were unaware that Christian-based counseling programs were available.

Consistent with Walker's (1978) assertion that challenges to personal integrity and convictions are involved for persons of a religious background seeking a secular education, some participants reported being fearful of the challenges they expected from a secular program. Similar to Worthington's (1986) finding that clients who hold religion to be very important fear they may be misunderstood or misdiagnosed in counseling, findings from this study suggested that several participants feared being misunderstood or were misunderstood by faculty and peers. In fact, some participants experienced a devaluation of their Christian worldview, beliefs, and values. However, despite any fears, expected challenges or prior expectations, participants had positive experiences overall while attending a secular program.

Based on participants' reflections on secular programs, they noted that they often made efforts to reconcile or incorporate Christian and secular worldviews in one of two

primary manners. Some participants engaged in a filtering process, incorporating concepts from secular education that agreed with their Christian beliefs and values and dismissing concepts that did not. Other participants separated their Christian identity from their counseling identity in an attempt to reconcile the sometimes differing or conflicting worldviews. Two of the seven participants indicated that they learned strategies for integrating secular and Christian worldviews while in seminary. This finding lends credence to the suggestion that pastoral counseling may provide an additional strategy for integrating secular and Christian worldviews (Woodruff, 2002).

Over the past century, pastoral counseling has become more pronounced and developed into a discipline that has helped to mediate and integrate the sometimes competing secular and religious worldviews as they relate to counseling. For the sake of clarification, pastoral counseling refers to spiritually integrated counseling that requires graduate level and clinical training in counseling, as well as graduate education in religious studies (Woodruff, 2002). Training in pastoral counseling is focused on the same clinical competencies as mental health practitioners, with additional emphasis on spiritual and theological dimensions of mental health and counseling interventions (Giblin & Barz, 1993). Pastoral care and counseling have grown to be an effective and accepted practice across theological, psychological, and counseling professions (Eliaison, Hanley, & Leventis, 2001). However, Power (1990) suggested that if pastoral counseling is to achieve an identity that is satisfying to both theologians and secular practitioners, pastoral counselors must resolve the dilemma between the predominately humanistic values of the psychological community and the theological values of the religious community.

Tisdale (2003) suggested that counselor training has just begun to include religion and spirituality as an area of diversity education. Tisdale noted that increased dialogue would provide an opportunity for greater understanding of the process of change as it applies to those with religious and psychological interests (Moon, 2002). Participants from this study supported these contentions as they unanimously expressed a desire for increased training and dialogue related to religion and spirituality. As Myers (2004) suggested, educators, counselors, and counselor-trainees can seek competence related to pastoral counseling and techniques for integration of psychology, theology, and spirituality. In addition, educators, counselors, and counselor-trainees can learn to recognize overlapping religious and mental health interests and methods when approaching religion and mental health and engage in more interdisciplinary dialogue and practice (Myers).

Category II: Experiences Attending Secular Programs

Participants described their experiences while attending a secular program. Experiences were grouped as positive, difficult, faculty and peer interactions, response to experiences, and desired experiences.

Positive Experiences. Participants in this study clearly reported an overall positive experience while attending secular programs. However, despite several probes to explore depth of participant responses, few additional descriptions were provided. Concepts such as natural fit, importance of diversity, personal growth, receptivity to Christian perspectives, Christian peer support and accommodation to religious activities were used as specific reasons that participants perceived their experiences as positive.

Difficult Experiences. Some respondents also experienced some difficulties. Difficulties appeared related to the students' unique identity, beliefs, and values as conservative orthodox Christians. Participants indicated that they experienced difficulties related to value differences, ethical and time conflicts, and intolerance and disrespect. Participants also believed that some faculty and peers held negative perceptions about Christians. As a result, participants felt disrespected and inhibited in terms of their self-expressions. In fact, participants' responses illustrated that some faculty and peers were "biased" or "anti-faith" when it came to conservative orthodox Christians and their beliefs and values. Participants' reports about *difficult* experiences, such as *negative perceptions*, *intolerance* and *disrespect*, lend evidence to Blazer's (1998) assertion that mental health professionals sometimes display biases against religious persons. Likewise, Danesi (2003) suggested that persons who are politically or religiously conservative may experience discrimination.

Another difficult experience reported by participants pertained to a social psychology theory that may be inherently biased in its construct against Christian beliefs or values. This finding is similar to what has been reported in the literature related to how theories, research, or constructs that reflect a non-theistic disposition may have to be reviewed to take religious cultural perspectives into account to ensure cultural sensitivity (Bergin, 1983; Watson, Folbrecht, Morris, & Hood, 1990; Worthington et al., 1988). Similarly, many psychological interventions and mental health perspectives have held an inclination that religiosity is as an impediment to healthy mental and emotional functioning (Ellis, 1980; Freud, 1961; Yalom, 1980). Meta-analysis of the literature does not appear to support a preconception that religiousness is necessarily correlated with

psychopathology (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Bergin, 1983; Gartner et al.1991; Levin & Vanderpool, 1987; Worthington et al., 1996). While not conclusive, the majority of evidence appears to favor a positive relationship between mental health and religion (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi; Bergin; Gartner et al.; Levin & Vanderpool; Worthington et al.). Thus, there exists an inconsistency between literature and biases and negative predispositions that maintain religiousness as an unhealthy attribute (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi; Bergin; Gartner et al; Levin & Vanderpool; Worthington et al.). Biases and negative predispositions that maintain religiousness as an unhealthy attribute are also at odds with concepts of multiculturalism, ethical guidelines and standards (ACA, 2005; CACREP, 1994).

Some participants also reported that peers and faculty labeled Christians as closed minded or intolerant. Labels were attributed to several factors. First, some participants believed that faculty and peers lacked understanding of the Bible and Christian beliefs. Second, some participants thought faculty and peers misunderstood the difference between accepting people and accepting ideas, values, and behaviors. Finally, some participants believed that some Christians were intolerant, which fostered negative perceptions of Christians and Christianity. Additionally, participants stated that generalizations, stereotypes, negative media portrayals, transference, focusing on extreme experiences or people, and focusing on negative past experiences may lead to negative perceptions of Christians.

When negative perceptions or misperceptions did occur, participants suggested that those perceptions could influence conservative orthodox Christian students in several ways. One participant suggested that negative perceptions or misperceptions could lead

to a deepening of faith, more accepting attitudes, and solidification of Christian beliefs. Another participant indicated that students could continue to discuss faith and point out that not tolerating conservative orthodox Christian views is similar to not respecting conservative orthodox Christians. Other participants thought students might become withdrawn and more cautious about disclosures or even leave the counseling profession or abandon the incorporation of Christian perspectives into counseling. Another participant thought negative perceptions or misperceptions might not have any impact at all. Based on participants' responses, the influence of negative perceptions or misperceptions would depend upon whether or not the students were firm in their Christian identity. Participants insinuated that a lack of instruction and lack of available courses in religion and spirituality may explain why faculty and peers struggle with concepts related to Christianity. In fact, studies have shown that programs were not addressing religion and spirituality as part of their curriculum (Kelly, 1997, 1994, Pate & High, 1995; Reyes, 2002; Schulte et al., 2002; Young et al., 2002).

Discussions about participants' difficult experiences while attending a secular program led to respondents' comments about how they dealt with such struggles. In general, participants indicated that they confided in Christian friends and family members as a means to cope as opposed to faculty or secular peers. In fact, one participant suggested that he would not process difficult experiences with faculty or peers because he was not sure if that would be appropriate, if he would be understood, or if his difficulties would be received.

Faculty and peer interactions. Participants described a variety of experiences in relation to both faculty and peer interactions. Experiences ranged on a continuum from positive to difficult. Overall, participants reported positive interactions with faculty and most peers. However, some participants reported difficult interactions between themselves and faculty or peers.

In terms of positive interactions, participants indicated that they had been invited to take part in research opportunities, encouraged to be involved in religious activities, and offered Christian site placements. Furthermore, participants received support from faculty in terms of letters of recommendation. In addition, participants described positive attributes such as considerate, respectful, approachable, caring, and thoughtful when referring to specific faculty members.

When participants did report difficult interactions, they pertained primarily to interactions with other students. Examples of negative experiences with peers involved derogatory comments, discomfort with Christian expressions, and other negative reactions to Christian students.

Response to experiences. Participants described a variety of responses to their experiences while attending a secular counseling or counseling psychology program which varied depending on whether an experience was positive or difficult. For example, when participants had positive experiences, their response involved becoming more open minded, less judgmental, encouraged, motivated, and more invested in their program. In reaction to difficult experiences, participants described regretting not sharing their perspectives, acting defensively, feeling singled out, fearing repercussions, experiencing difficult emotions, and becoming withdrawn and struggling with their Christian identity.

Ironically, participants also indicated that difficult experiences led them to reaffirm open-mindedness and Christian values and strengthen their identity. According to responses, participants also became more autonomous and sought opportunities to share their faith as a result of the difficult experiences they encountered.

Desired experiences. Participants had a variety of experiences as Christian students attending a secular counseling or counseling psychology program. As a result, respondents described various desired experiences. Participants stated they wanted permission to express conservative orthodox Christian perspectives and that they expected openness and receptivity to those expressions and perceptions by faculty and peers alike. Some participants expressed a desire for a Christian support group. Participants also stated that they wanted supervision and education in regards to religion and spirituality. In addition, participants wanted faculty to have more education, experience, and interest in research that related to religion and spirituality. One participant recommended faculty make disclosures related to their beliefs on religion and spirituality, so students could consider the faculty viewpoints during discussions. Finally, participants desired that faculty and peers would refrain from imposing their views on conservative orthodox Christian students and that they would provide more opportunities for self-exploration.

Findings from this study may suggest that counselors are not receiving adequate training in spiritual and religious diversity, and are not adequately trained in how to respond to this diversity or the variables that influence spirituality and religion (Hickson et al., 2000). Accordingly, training specific to spiritual and religious diversity and how to respond to that diversity is necessary (Hickson et al.). Participants unanimously implied

that the counseling community continues to make efforts to advocate for religious diversity. A thoughtful inclusion of religious and spiritual issues in the core curriculum has been suggested as reasonable to prepare counselors to work ethically and effectively with religious and spiritual issues in secular settings (Burke et al., 1999).

Category III: Christian Identity

Several themes were used to describe participants' perceptions related to identity. Respondents described Christian identity in terms of identity expression, appropriate context and manner for expression, maintenance, and change.

Identity expression. There were a variety of responses that described Christian identity expressions. Participants implied or used words like concealment, restriction, and uncertainty to describe their perceptions related to their ability to express themselves as conservative orthodox Christians. They also reflected on and questioned the appropriate context, manner and importance of expression, and a need to clarify their perspectives. In fact, when reflecting on their experiences and reactions to this research process, the majority of participants described a sense of freedom in being able to express themselves as Christians in ways they had not experienced while attending their programs.

Participants stated that they did not have a desire to impose Christian beliefs or values on others. They also clarified that they respected other people's beliefs and values when they differed or conflicted with their own Christian beliefs and values. When beliefs and values were in conflict, some participants described separating their Christian identity from their role as counselors to resolve the conflict. Other participants described a desire to maintain their Christian identity while resolving conflicts.

Some participants thought others had misperceptions related to Christians or Christian beliefs in counseling and academic contexts. As a result these participants expressed a desire to help others understand their Christian beliefs and perspectives. Finally, explanations were offered as to why others may misunderstand Christians or Christian beliefs, which included a lack of experience in reading or misunderstanding the content of the Bible, and not understanding Christian concepts.

Appropriate context and manner for expression. Participants described appropriate contexts for expressing Christian beliefs or values in terms of relevance to the discussion at hand. For example, respondents believed that it would be appropriate to discuss topics such as spirituality, religion, ethics, and personal values when discussing specific client issues, treatment planning or when prompted by faculty or other students related to such topics. Most participants seemed to agree that expressions would be inappropriate if shared randomly. However, two participants remarked that Christian expressions were appropriate at any time, because a worldview permeates all topics.

When participants described the appropriate manner to express Christian beliefs, they offered specific strategies to consider. Strategies included owning the expressions and refraining from universal statements, being open, and using non-threatening and non-judgmental language. Additional strategies included listening to others, clarifying that the expressions are not meant to impose beliefs, and being genuine, honest, and respectful.

Participants suggested that religion and spirituality are not addressed in an academic setting for several reasons. For instance, some faculty and students don't discuss religion and spirituality because they fear offending others and lack

understanding related to spirituality. In addition, many faculty restrict discussion because of time constraints and large classroom settings which are not conducive to such discussions. Finally, one student suggested there was a historical tradition of not discussing religion and spirituality in academia and counseling.

Identity maintenance. Participants described a variety of activities which helped them maintain their sense of identity as conservative orthodox Christians. Social activities included attending church, Sunday school and retreats, and maintaining Christian friendships. Participants also reported going on mission trips, leading church activities, doing volunteer work, incorporating faith into family life, and maintaining identity while forming new friendships with people who are not Christians. Finally, individual activities included Bible reading, study, and prayer.

Identity change. Participants reported a variety of responses that pertained to changes in their Christian identity and participants appeared to contradict themselves at times. Respondents' statements about the influence of attending a secular program ranged on a continuum of having either no impact or positive or negative change. Participants who reported positive changes while attending a secular program indicated that they became more accepting of others, and more proactive and responsible for their faith.

Changes described as negative included compromising Christian values and engaging in behaviors contrary to their Christian beliefs. Similar to Worthington's (1986) finding that clients who hold religion to be very important fear their values will be changed, one participant perceived pressure to change his beliefs or values. In addition, some evidence suggests that there is a decline in traditional religious beliefs with

increased clinical training and experience (Harman, 2002). Decline in traditional religious beliefs may suggest students' religious beliefs are being influenced during training. For example, one participant reported a change in her traditional Christian beliefs in regards to the concept of *sin* and a lessening of importance of religious rules or teachings.

Findings from this study suggested that, overall, participants did not perceive any direct correlation between changes in identity, beliefs, values or behaviors and their experiences in secular counseling and counseling psychology programs. Participants only described the program's influence on changes they may have experienced as a compliment or supplement. Thus, faculty or programs do not appear to be influencing conservative orthodox Christian students in identity, behavior, beliefs, and values or conservative orthodox Christian students are not recognizing the influence that their faculty or programs have on them. If religious students are being influenced by their secular programs toward secular beliefs and values, but are unaware of the influence, faculty or programs may be acting unethically.

All counselors have the potential to act unethically based on their own biases. For example, a religious counselor may promote changes in non-religious persons that are not valued by those persons. Thus, the religious counselor would be acting in an unethical manner. Similarly, there is a danger that secular counselors could act as moralists promoting secular values, thus promoting change not valued by religious persons or communities and thereby acting unethically (Bergin, 1980).

One of the goals of department chairs and faculty, as gatekeepers of the counseling profession, may be to influence students into what is and what is not

acceptable behavior, beliefs, and values. On one hand, the programs' or faculties' particular philosophy, theoretical orientation, beliefs, and values could be made known to students, so that the students could make informed decisions. In response a student might choose to pursue training and potentially be influenced to conform to the particular programs' or faculties' desired image, or choose to pursue a program and training that reflected the student's particular goals, beliefs and values. On the other hand, programs or faculties could work within a multicultural framework to be sensitive to the religious person's unique cultural beliefs and values.

Verification Procedures

Several steps were taken to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of data in order to ensure that findings were based on participants' experiences. My dissertation chair and a peer reviewer examined transcripts, reduction of data, and a summary of memorandums in order to explore alternative conclusions and to assist me in bracketing my biases. Outliers and exceptions to usual verbal responses were explored to curb against inaccurate reporting of data and to assist in developing holistic findings. Recognizing that data are subjective, I also maintained and reviewed a reflexive journal to achieve as much objectivity as possible. Member checks were also used throughout all three interviews to ensure accurate understanding of verbal and observed responses. Likewise, a final interview was conducted when findings were shared with participants to determine whether they accurately reflected respondents' experiences. Although generalizability in the traditional quantitative sense was not expected to be achieved for this study, ensuring the credibility of findings facilitated the possibility of transferability

of findings for future research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Despite verification procedures, there were some limitations to my investigation.

Limitations

Limitations for this study included issues related to lack of experience as a qualitative researcher and potential biases, participant sample, and lack of participant response in the final round of interviews. Each limitation and method used to address each limitation will be discussed in the section that follows.

My experience as a researcher influenced this study in many ways. My first research experience as a primary investigator was obtained when conducting an experiment using quantitative methodology for an undergraduate honor's thesis. This is the second investigation I have conducted as the primary researcher, but the first using qualitative methods. Although I am an experienced interviewer, I am limited in applying interview skills for research purposes. In addition, my personal biases may have influenced the study; thus, the depth of responses and areas of inquiry may have been affected. For example, as I reviewed findings I noticed that there appeared to be more depth and description as it pertained to *difficult* experiences in contrast to *positive* experiences despite my efforts to garner a greater depth of description of positive experiences. I was unsure if the focus of depth and description was due to a bias on my part or an inclination in participants to focus on experiences that concerned them as opposed to experiences that went well.

Gartner et al., (1991) suggested that many studies that pertained to religion and mental health have been simplistic or have had methodological flaws and did not account for confounding variables. Studies have also failed to differentiate among potential

factors such as ethnicity, regional diversity, and religious orientation. Participant selection was also a limitation in this study.

Due to the nature of the phenomenon under investigation, the participant sample was limited to conservative orthodox Christian students attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs in the south-central region of the United States. The sample size was small and not indicative of the larger population of counseling students and counseling psychology students from accredited programs across the United States. In addition, the participant sample was not ethnically diverse. Greater ethnic and regional diversity could have contributed to the generalizability of findings. For example, participants who identify with cultural influences in the southern United States or “Bible belt” who may maintain a more conservative perspective may have reported different experiences than participants who identify with cultural influences in the north-eastern United States who may maintain a more liberal perspective.

Another limitation that pertained to participants involved pre-screening. Participants were not screened for intrinsic versus extrinsic religious orientation due to resource limitations. Participants who identified themselves as Christians for social reasons may have qualitatively different experiences than participants who actually practice and attempt to adhere to the tenets of the Christian faith (Gartner et al., 1991). However, for this study, the participants’ orientation was unknown.

Finally, three of the seven participants were unavailable for the last interview. The three participants who did not complete the final interview were the same respondents who reported the most difficult experiences while attending a public, secular,

accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate program. Although member checks were conducted and confirmed for findings for the first two rounds of interviews, the unavailable participants could not confirm or disconfirm findings. Consequently, trustworthiness and the credibility of findings would have been increased if all seven participants had been able to complete the final round of interviews.

Methods to Address Limitations

In order to address the limitations of this investigation, I employed several procedures throughout data collection and analysis. Verification procedures served to strengthen the credibility of the findings. Specifically, member checks, consultation with an experienced qualitative researcher, and peer reviews were employed throughout the research process. I also maintained a reflexive journal that provided a description of data collection procedures as well as my experiences with participants. I discussed my thoughts about the study with the peer reviewer and experienced qualitative researcher to ensure that findings were consistent with participants' reported experiences. I also shared peer review comments with participants to gain each participant's perspectives on the peer reviewer's considerations. Finally, I provided an in-depth explanation of the methodology and procedures used throughout the study, so that future researchers could replicate the study or research process.

Implications

One of the main reasons this study was conducted was to inform counselor educators, mental health professionals, supervisors, and counselors-in-training about the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs. Given the

suggested discrepancy between the perceived importance of religious diversity as outlined by professional ethics and standards and the lack of attention given to the topic (Zimmer-Souza, 1999), this investigation had the potential to contribute significantly to the literature base. From my personal perspective, the exploration of this area was necessary if counselors and educators are to ensure fair and equitable treatment of persons of faith. It is hoped that findings from this study provided valuable information which can be intertwined with ethical standards and guidelines to enhance multicultural competence and counseling curricula, offer information that might be useful in clinical supervision, and expose complications that may arise when working with conservative orthodox Christian students. Finally, implications regarding future research that pertains to the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students are explored.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism, tolerance, and respect for diversity are core values of the ACA and CACREP standards, as well as APA and CoA standards; thus, multiculturalism is clearly an important aspect of counseling and counseling psychology. Findings from this study indicated that conservative orthodox Christian students experienced positive faculty and peer interactions as they related to their unique Christian identities. This finding illustrated that some students experienced faculty and peer as tolerant and respectful of their religious and spiritual diversity. Thus, findings from this investigation support the notion that some faculty and students in secular accredited counseling and counseling psychology programs adhere to multicultural competencies when working with conservative orthodox Christian students.

Findings from this study also indicated that conservative orthodox Christian students experienced some difficulties related to their unique identities, beliefs, and values. For example, some respondents reported experiencing derogatory comments because of their expressed Christian beliefs and values. Other participants implied intolerance through a lack of receptivity of expressed beliefs and values. Thus, findings from this investigation support the notion that some faculty and students in secular accredited counseling and counseling psychology programs do not adhere to multicultural competencies when working with conservative orthodox Christian students.

The most important implication for multiculturalism can be defined in terms of counselors' and educators' responsibility to advocate for tolerance and respect for diversity of conservative orthodox Christian students' worldviews, beliefs, and values. If counselors and educators are not experienced with and knowledgeable about conservative orthodox Christians, findings from this investigation could serve as a means to educate faculty, counselors, and students alike. Findings from this study suggest that counselors, students and faculty learn about multicultural concepts such as advocacy for pluralism, tolerance, respect for diversity, and the promotion of personal, professional, and academic success for all students who attend secular programs.

Ethical Standards

Many governing bodies, including the ACA, CACREP, AMCD, and ASERVIC, provide general principles to guide the ethical responsibilities of counseling and educators in religious diversity. Findings from this study suggested counseling educators met some ethical standards. In fact, participants indicated that some faculty refrained from imposing views on students, and accommodated and encouraged respondents in

religious activities. One participant, in particular, reported being pleased that the topics of religion and spirituality were being discussed in class and supervision, and that Christian perspectives may be appreciated.

Findings from this investigation indicated that counseling faculty and students who are already open to religious and spiritual diversity could continue to refrain from imposing secular or personal worldviews and values on conservative orthodox Christian clients or students. Likewise, these faculty and students are encouraged to continue to be receptive and open to conservative orthodox Christian perspectives and approaches to counseling and allow students to express their perceptions when appropriate.

In contrast, findings from this investigation illuminated the fact that some conservative orthodox Christian students experienced difficulty when they expressed Christian values and beliefs. In fact, some participants implied faculty and peer behavior conflicted with ethical standards and was indicative of a lack of respect for Christian worldviews, beliefs, and values. On occasion, some participants seemed to expect difficult experiences while attending secular counseling education programs. When some students encountered such difficulties, they doubted themselves as well as their choices about attending the program at hand. For example, one participant considered resigning from his program due to difficult experiences he encountered and another participant actually withdrew from her program and re-entered several years later.

In an effort to address concerns and adhere to ethical guidelines that stipulate multicultural competence, counseling faculty and program administrators are encouraged to be sensitive to recruitment and retention practices with conservative orthodox Christian students pursuing secular education. Findings from this investigation also

suggested that faculty and administrators be encouraged to be more sensitive to the unique challenges faced by conservative orthodox Christian students. Educators, supervisors, and counselors could serve as role models for ethical behavior and ensure that counseling programs, specific courses, and clinical supervision adhere to guidelines that stipulate respect for diverse religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. Counseling faculty could also encourage students to refrain from discrimination against conservative orthodox Christian clients or peers.

AMCD standards recommend that counselor educators and students obtain additional education and supervision specific to their own cultural values and biases regarding religion. In particular, counselor educators and students could explore their beliefs related to conservative orthodox Christian persons and worldviews. The eventual goal would be for faculty and students to learn to use culturally appropriate strategies with all peers and clients, including conservative orthodox Christian students.

Counseling Training Programs

Findings from this investigation also provided information about how counseling educators can serve as role models for students if they are more sensitive to religious and spiritual diversity. For example, faculty could take responsibility for educating themselves about various religious beliefs and practices. Counseling educators could also encourage students to do the same. This would ensure proper treatment for clients who possess strong religious beliefs and serve as a deterrent for those who view such clients as pathological.

Curriculum Development

In striving to meet minimal CACREP (2001) standards, counseling educators could incorporate literature and concepts that provide an understanding of various religious and spiritual belief systems and practices throughout the curriculum. This might ensure that the cultural context of relationships, issues, and trends of conservative orthodox Christian beliefs and values are respected. In addition, program objectives and curriculum could ensure that flexibility is provided throughout a program. Flexibility might include accommodating conservative orthodox Christian students' beliefs and values, religious activities, and advocating for these students where institutional and social barriers impede equal access, equity, and success.

Overall, findings from this study might be used to suggest where guidelines and standards are being met and where improvements can be made across various courses throughout counseling education. For specifics regarding how to implement curriculum changes, administrators, faculty, counselors and students are encouraged to explore the nine religious and spiritual competencies that have been recommended by ASERVIC (Miller, 1999).

Future research

The focus of this study was to describe the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs. The findings provided a basic foundation from which additional research may be conducted. Such research may add to, refute, or clarify findings as they relate to conservative orthodox Christian students' experiences while

attending a public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate program.

In particular, future research could contribute to the literature and provide useful findings where gaps of information still exist. Examples of specific research questions are:

- (1) What are faculty perceptions of and experiences with conservative orthodox Christian students attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs?
- (2) What are secular peers' perceptions of and experiences with conservative orthodox Christian students' attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs?
- (3) Are conservative orthodox Christian students' expressions of their values and beliefs oppressed in public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs?

Concluding Remarks

This research endeavor has added to my understanding of conservative orthodox Christian students' experiences while attending secular counseling programs. I am reminded that my personal experience is not everyone's experience. Different students have a variety of experiences during their formal graduate education and training. Experiences and perceptions are complex and include many contributing factors.

I believe participants' perceptions and experiences may have been influenced by a network of factors. Some factors may be individual influences such as personality characteristics, perception, gender, race, spiritual, emotional and intellectual

development, disposition toward challenge and intrinsic versus extrinsic religious orientation. Other factors may be environmental such as present or prior experiences, religious denomination, relational experiences, training and education, region where program is located and programmatic issues.

I was surprised and comforted that most participants have had an overall positive experience thus far in their academic programs and training. When students have had difficult experiences, they seemed to have used such experiences as opportunities for growth and personal development. However, I was disappointed that at times conservative orthodox Christian students experienced struggle, conflict, and uncomfortable emotions because of others' perceptions of their worldview, beliefs, and values, particularly in a discipline that champions tolerance and respect for diversity. My experiences throughout this study have provoked many new questions. Is there room for conservative orthodox Christianity in the counseling community? Is there a double standard in regards to ethical requirements for tolerance and respect for diversity when they are applied to conservative orthodox Christians? Are conservative orthodox Christian beliefs and values oppressed in secular environments? Should conservative orthodox Christians' opportunities be limited to Christian universities and work environments?

I have several learning points to share from conducting my research. First, it is important for me to continue to strive for tolerance and respect for the religiously diverse and to promote cultural competence in working with the religiously diverse. Second, it is important for me to help conservative orthodox Christian students and clientele claim their Christian voice, identity, beliefs, and value expressions. Finally, it is important for

me to continue to develop and grow in my Christian faith and still afford the respect and tolerance of others that I request for myself.

The perspectives of the two participants who did not report any difficult experiences, has challenged me to question my own perceptions, cognitions, and feelings related to my own difficult experiences and to consider alternative explanations for those experiences. In addition, the struggle, reframing, and growth of conservative orthodox Christian students who used their difficult experiences as opportunities for growth has encouraged and inspired me in my own Christian walk and professional development.

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Appendix A
Human Subjects Committee Approval

University Committee for the Protection
of Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans

Form Number: 03nov04

(please refer to this number in all future correspondence concerning this protocol)

Principal Investigator: Paul Schaefer/Teresa Christiansen Title: Student/faculty advisor

Department: Educational leadership College: Education

Project Title: Experiences of orthodox Christian students attending a secular counseling program

Dates of Proposed Project Period From 10/25/04 to 4/15/05

Approval Status:

☒ Full Board Review

☒ Approved Date: 1/6/05

☐ Expedite

☐ Deferred Date:

☐ Exempt

☐ Disapproved Date:

☐ Project requires review more than annually. Review every _____ months.

**approval is for 1 year from approval date only and may be renewed yearly.*

1st continuation Signature of IRB Chair

Date:

2nd continuation Signature of IRB Chair

Date:

3rd continuation Signature of IRB Chair

Date:

4th continuation Signature of IRB Chair

Date:

Committee Signatures:

 Laura Scaramella, Ph.D. (Chair)

 Pamela Jenkins, Ph.D.

 Anthony Kontos, Ph.D. (Associate chair)

 Richard B. Speaker, Ph.D.

 Gary Talarchek, Ph.D.

 Kari Walsh

 Kathleen Whalen

 L. Allen Witt, Ph.D.

Appendix B

Introduction Letter

October 19, 2004

Dear Potential Research Participant.

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Counselor Education at the University of New Orleans, and I am requesting your participation in my dissertation research. My interest pertains to the experiences of Christian students attending counseling and counseling psychology programs. Although there has been an increase in literature concerning spirituality and religion over the past decade, there have been few studies that have focused on the experiences of Christian students attending counseling programs. Therefore, I hope to interview Christian students who are currently enrolled in a public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs. This information could be used to provide useful information regarding Christian students' experiences as they relate to current ethical standards and guidelines, and lead to further research and dialog in the area of religious diversity.

Participants will voluntarily participate in (3) 60-90 minute individual interviews. The interviews will be conducted face to face. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

I believe that sharing your experiences and perceptions could make a valuable contribution to the literature. I hope that you will choose to take part in this study. I am excited and look forward to hearing from you within the next week if you would like to participate. My contact information has been given below so that we can schedule a convenient time for our initial interview. You are welcome to contact me at any time should you have any questions or concerns regarding this study. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Paul D. Schaefer
Doctoral Candidate
University of New Orleans
Office: (504) 280-6661
E-mail: pdschaef@hotmail.com

Appendix C
Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

1. Title of Research Study

Experiences of Conservative Orthodox Christian Students Attending Public Secular Accredited Counseling and Counseling Psychology Graduate Programs

2. Project Director

Paul D. Schaefer, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA 70148. Telephone (504) 833-4673. Email address: pdschaef@hotmail.com

I am under the supervision of Dr. Teresa Christensen, Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA 70148. Telephone (504) 280-7434.

3. Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of conservative orthodox Christian students attending public, secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs. This information will be used to add to the literature base concerning ethical treatment of the religiously diverse.

4. Procedures for this Research

Participants will voluntarily participate in three individual interviews. The interviews will take place face to face and last 60-90 minutes. All interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed for data analysis. Dissertation committee members may review transcripts or audio-tapes. Transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet for security. Participant information will be coded and then deleted for purposes of confidentiality and anonymity.

5. Potential Risks of Discomforts

Due to the nature of this research, there are no identifiable risks to participants. However, as a researcher I will do all I can to ensure the protection and safety of participants. Therefore, I will explore any concerns you might have about the disclosure of professional and personal information related to this study. The purpose of this research is to gather information and is not intended for therapeutic purposes. All aspects of participation are voluntary, and participants may choose to terminate participation at any time. If you have any questions or would like to discuss any aspect of the research, you may contact me or my supervisor at any time.

6. Potential Benefits to You and Others

The results of this research could be used to determine where ethical standards are being met or where there is room for improvement and to fill in gaps where information is lacking. It may also provide a sense of voice to participants as they disclose information that may be important to them.

7. Alternative Procedures

There are no alternative procedures. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequences. There is no monetary compensation for participation in this study.

8. Protection of Confidentiality

Your name and all affiliations will be kept confidential at all times. Pseudonyms will be given for participants, so your name will not be identified on audio tapes. All audio tapes will be transcribed by a professional transcriptionist or by the Project Director. The signed consent forms, audio tapes, interview transcripts, and any other materials related to this project will be maintained in a secure and confidential manner by the Project Director.

9. Signatures

I have been fully informed of the above-described procedures with its' possible benefits and risks, and I have given permission for participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Name of Participant (Print)

Date

Signature of Project Director

Name of Project Director (Print)

Date

Appendix D
Initial Interview Protocol

Experiences of Conservative Orthodox
Christians Attending a Public Secular
accredited Counseling and Counseling Psychology
Graduate Program

INITIAL INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe your experiences as an orthodox Christian in a secular, counseling graduate program?
2. How would you describe your experiences with peers and faculty?
3. In general, how would you describe your reactions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in response to your experiences?

NOTE: Probing questions will be used throughout the interview(s) to investigate participants' perceptions and experiences in depth. Follow-up interview questions will be based on analysis of first round interviews and initial findings.

Appendix E
Demographics Inventory

Demographics Inventory

1. Gender: _____ Male _____ Female
2. Date of Birth: _____ Age: _____
3. Ethnic/Racial Background:
_____ African-American _____ Hispanic
_____ Arab-American _____ Native American
_____ Asian-American _____ Biracial/Multiracial
_____ Caucasian _____ Pacific Islander
_____ Other, please specify _____
4. Are you currently enrolled as a Counseling Student? ___ Yes ___ No
Is the Counseling Program at a Public Secular University? ___ Yes ___ No
5. Do you already have a degree in Counseling? _____ Yes _____ No
Which degree do you have? ___ M.A. ___ M.Ed. ___ Ph.D. ___ Ed.D.
6. How long have you been attending the secular counseling program? _____ Years,
_____ months
7. Have you had any courses that specifically address religion/spirituality in the secular counseling program? _____ Yes _____ No
(a) Are any courses that address religion/spirituality offered in the secular counseling program? _____ Yes _____ No
8. Are you a Christian? _____ Yes _____ No
9. Do you affirm the following statement? _____ Yes _____ No

"I believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds [God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [essence] with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and Son, He is glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one holy church (body of

believer's). I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead and life in the world to come."

10. On average, how many times do you participate in prayer each week? _____

11. On average, how many times do you attend a Christian church each week? _____

12. On average, how many times do you read the Christian Bible each week? _____

13. How important are your religious experiences and involvement?

_____(1-3) Not important _____(4-7) Somewhat important _____(8-10)Very important

14. Which Christian denomination do you identify with (example: Catholic, Baptist,

Non-denomenational, etc...)? _____

15. Would you say that you are liberal or conservative in your theological beliefs?

_____liberal _____conservative

Appendix F
Criteria for Selection of Participants

Criteria for Selection of Participants

To participate in the study, participants must meet the following criteria:

- 1) Participants must show interest in the topic by responding to volunteer solicitations.
- 2) Participants must affirm identification as active participants in the Christian faith
 - (a) Participants must affirm the Nicene Creed.
 - (b) Participants must engage in regular prayer (at least one time per week).
 - (c) Participants must attend a Christian church (at least one time per week).
 - (d) Participants must read the Bible regularly (at least one time per week)
 - (e) Participants must assign a high degree of importance to religious experiences and involvement.
- 3) Participants must be currently enrolled in a graduate level CACREP-accredited counseling program or CoA-accredited counseling psychology program at a public secular university.
- 4) Participants must be willing to openly share their experiences as a Christian student in a public secular counseling graduate program.
- 5) Participants must be willing to commit to (3) 60-90 minute interviews.

The Nicene Creed

"We believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds [God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [essence] with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was

crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and Son, he is glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy...church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and life in the world to come. Amen (Anderson, 1999)."

Vita

Paul D. Schaefer earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology with honors in 1995 and a Master of Arts degree in counselor education in 1998 from the University of New Orleans. In addition to his current doctoral studies, he is pursuing a Master of Divinity degree at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He is a Licensed Professional Counselor in the state of Louisiana and is a nationally certified counselor.

Paul has over 10 years experience in the mental health field. In 2005, he helped found Celebration Hope Center, a Christian faith-based non-profit mental health and licensed substance abuse counseling center located in Metairie, Louisiana. He currently serves as the center's Executive Director. Paul has also served for over 16 years with the Louisiana Army National Guard. He has deployed over seas for Operation Enduring Freedom and recently redeployed from active duty after hurricane Katrina.